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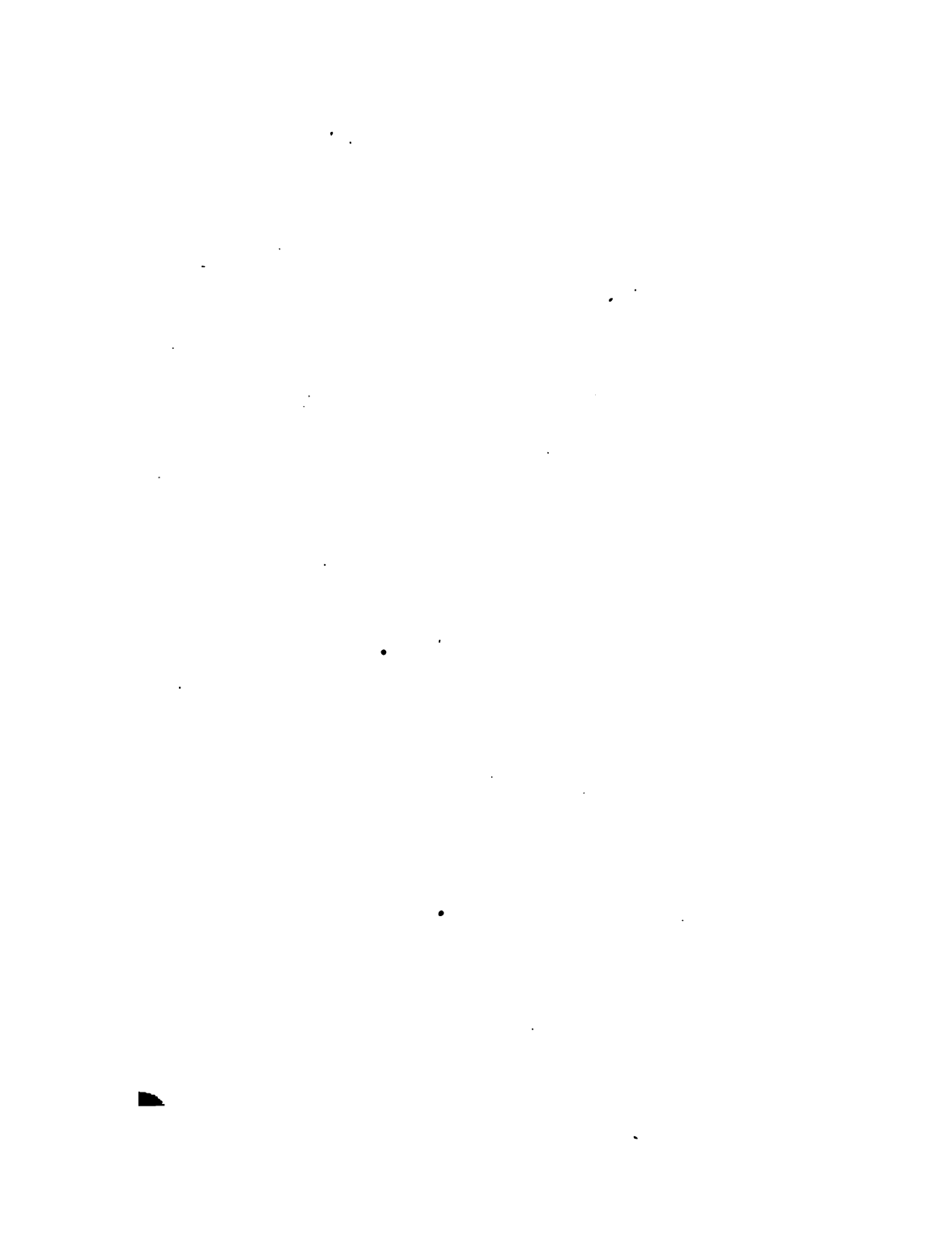




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THE HAMMONDS OF HOLYCROSS.

VOL. I.



THE HAMMONDS OF HOLYCROSS.

BY

LADY BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF

“MY STEP-FATHER’S HOME,”

Etc.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE HAMMONDS OF HOLYCROSS.

CHAPTER I.



HOLYCROSS was a pretty market town in one of the Eastern Counties—clean and pleasant-looking, and presenting towards its outskirts something of a village-like appearance. It was approached on one side by a wide open green or common, with dwellings of various degrees dotted over it at intervals ; and when the houses became more uniform, they were in many

places interspersed with large trees, which agreeably relieved the monotony of the brick buildings, giving the town a picturesque and somewhat foreign aspect. The wide old market-place, with its quaint and peculiar characteristics, seldom failed to attract the attention of visitors who looked upon it for the first time.

In the very centre of the square stood the old stone cross, which gave its name to the town, and its ancient legend to the chronicles thereof.

It was much esteemed by the inhabitants and revered by antiquarian travellers, and the huge defaced block of stone, in its primeval rudeness of construction, attested the authenticity of the early date claimed for its erection. A strong iron railing, a few yards distant from

and encompassing the base of the cross, preserved it from other ravages than those of time.

The surrounding space formed a square, three sides of which were composed of the principal buildings of the town—being those of the corn exchange, the town-hall, and the bank, each and all having some claim to that honour which is due to length of years and the respectability of their various destinations and callings.

It is, however, with the fourth and last side of the square that our business lies.

There, in the very centre, its entrance exactly facing the old stone cross, stood the ancient house of Holycross. It rose high and stern, with its old stone copings

and facings contrasting well with the dark red brick of which it was originally built; but now, from the force of time, its sanguine tints were amalgamated with the sober grey, which seemed to predominate over the more vivid hues of its pristine colour.

The mansion was flanked on either side by high brick walls, which extended some distance, and enclosed the trim old gardens and extensive pleasure-grounds. The whole was sheltered and shadowed by a tall row of Lombardy poplar trees, giving a peculiarly sombre appearance to the old house, before which they stood like sentinels in formal array.

The banking establishment, which also appertained to the possessors of Holycross House, stood on the opposite side of the

square; and in front of that, and the dwellings contiguous to the bank, ran the principal or high street of the town, leaving the ancient mansion on the further side standing aloof, in dignified seclusion, at the head of the square or market enclosure.

This residence was the "Home of the Hammonds," and had been in possession of the family ever since the founder, a merchant of some eminence, had settled there, some two or three centuries before the time of which we speak.

The Hammonds had rather singularly continued much in the same social, as well as local, position in which they had been placed by their earliest recorded ancestor. They had remained merchants and bankers at Holycross ever since.

At this time, about the year 184—, the old family mansion was inhabited by two brothers, both unmarried; and a widowed sister, with an only son, also resided with them.

The elder of these two brothers, Michael Hammond, was the head of his family, and also the senior partner of the banking-house of Hammond, Newton, and Forster—names well known and long respected in that part of the country. Michael was at that time a man of fifty, and had held his responsible position, both in a public and private capacity, for nearly thirty years. His father's death, occurring when he was little more than twenty years of age, called him thus early to fill so important a situation. It was one of much trust and consequence both at

home and in the banking department, which devolved upon him, as well as other mercantile connections of the house of Hammond.

The guardianship of the then numerous family, and the liabilities and responsibilities of the extensive commercial affairs of his father, were bequeathed to his care, with all the large property arising from the latter.

It had been the custom from time immemorial that the "House of Holycross" should, with the banking business, pass to the eldest son: in case of incapacity, to any other of the children deemed by the father most likely to do honour and credit to the long-established firm. This precaution had, no doubt, contributed to give the family, and their affairs, the

stability and prosperity they had so long enjoyed.

A moderate portion of five thousand pounds was allotted to each of the younger children on attaining their majority, the interest of which was to be devoted in the meanwhile to the purposes of education and maintenance. On the death of any of the said children, the money so appropriated was to revert to the head of the family.

Mr. Hammond, the father, no doubt enjoyed the satisfaction of feeling that he left a worthy successor in his eldest son, Michael, who, young as he was at that time, gave evidence of peculiar steadiness of mind and conduct, with an extraordinary aptitude for business. He thus took upon himself, and honourably fulfilled, the

trust reposed in him by his dying father. But in accepting his arduous position he became prematurely old, for no one remembered him very different from what he was in after-years. Michael's youth had seemed to wither away under his early cares and responsibilities; he had, in fact, for nearly twenty years, been considered as a middle-aged man.

In the course of the first few years which succeeded his father's death, the greater number of Michael's brothers and sisters faded away and died. Only one of each survived—the youngest son and child; and the sister who afterwards shared their home, as before mentioned.

Gabriel Hammond was quite an infant when his father died; and left thus early to his brother's care and guardianship,

with the great disparity of years between them, it was no wonder that the little boy regarded Michael more in the light of a parent than a brother. For several years the little Gabriel's chances of life seemed even more precarious than those of the children who had preceded him to their early graves. Even after he had struggled through his feeble infancy and childhood, there appeared but little hopes of his ever attaining the years of manhood.

Not only was he of very delicate frame and constitution, but, in his earliest years, so deficient in the powers of articulation and speech, that, until he was seven years old, there seemed great reason to suppose that the exercise of that faculty was denied to him.

Years, however, passed on, and the

sickly child lived and survived his mother, who, sinking under the accumulated sorrow of her many bereavements, died also, leaving her poor little dumb boy to the care of his brother Michael, who, with their sister Sybil, alone remained of the once numerous family. To the best of his power did Michael endeavour to supply the place of mother, as well as father, to the two children left to his protection, especially to the younger and much afflicted one, whose peculiar case demanded such constant and watchful care; and although not endowed by nature with a very tender or sympathising disposition, he endeavoured to atone for this defect in his character by the conscientious consideration he showed at all times for his young brother, and the skilful advice

which he procured for the amelioration of his many infirmities. In regard to that of speech, as it had always been evident the child's hearing was perfect, it was hoped, as he grew older and gained strength (if strength ever came to him), so in time the power of articulation might, in some measure, be also bestowed. This proved to be the case, and Gabriel spoke at last. His utterance was for many years imperfect; his words were slow, and often halting, especially when nervous or distressed; but, as time went on, his power of speech became a steadily improving faculty.

CHAPTER II.



MICHAEL, in the meanwhile, became year by year more deeply engrossed in his banking affairs and money-making habits. Still, in all these absorbing pursuits of gain and profit, he preserved and deserved the character of an upright and perfectly honest man. With a keen eye to his own interests, he never neglected those of any one concerned in money transactions with him, or sought to secure an advantage for himself to the detriment of

another. The toils of business had, in fact, become to him what pleasure and amusement are to many others ; but, whilst he added year by year to his possessions, he never cared to reap the advantages of his position by a larger expenditure at home, or in seeking amusement elsewhere.

Michael was, however, no miser. The House of Holycross was kept up in the style of quiet respectability that had been its characteristic for centuries past ; and he maintained it in a manner that left no room for remark or censure. Still the old house remained just the same as in his father's life-time ; little was added in the way of luxury or adornment. If it became necessary to replace any article of furniture or household goods, it was done

as nearly as possible to resemble that which was worn out, and with no view of substituting more beautiful or ornamental objects in their place. Thus the house preserved its old quaint appearance and antique character, but little disturbed by modern innovations or improvements.

Michael Hammond also gave liberally, if not freely, when convinced that the call upon his benevolence was a genuine and deserving subject for charity. He was never led astray in the distribution of his alms by any sudden impulse of feeling or generosity. Idleness and extravagance were alike abhorrent to his nature, and the effect of either, however disastrous, was met by him with stern and uncompromising reproof and refusals of assistance. He was often heard to

declare he saw no difference between the convicted thief and the specious man who wantonly and deliberately possessed himself of the goods of another without any means of repayment. In fact, he believed the latter to be more hurtful to the world at large than the former.

At stated intervals Mr. Hammond exchanged hospitalities with his numerous friends and acquaintances, but seldom went far from home, or made any long absence, except on particular and unavoidable occasions. He made few intimacies, for he was not naturally of a very social turn of mind, and his pursuits had served to withdraw him, in great measure, from general society. He had also little toleration for opinions and habits that differed essentially from his own, and was apt

to indulge in short sarcastic remarks respecting those who entertained them, whilst he rarely warmed into cordial friendship, even with those he had known the longest and respected the most. It was not the fault of Michael that his character lacked tenderness, or that his feelings were devoid of sensibility. He fortunately possessed good principles, and a sense of what was right and due to others, which prompted him to the performance of many kind and considerate actions.

It may easily be imagined that a man with a disposition thus constituted, was more esteemed than loved—more relied on for sound counsel than sought as a friend in time of sorrow or bereavement. Indeed, few could look upon Michael Hammond

as one whose presence brought with it any emotion of joy or sense of comfort.

There was one exception, however, to the general sentiment inspired by, and felt for, the upright but cold and uncongenial banker; and it was in that entertained by the little pale boy, with faltering speech, who fondly followed his brother's steps with his loving eyes wherever he went, and treasured his slightest word of kindness as a pearl beyond price. The simple words, "my brother," in poor Gabriel's mouth, contained an epitome of all his youthful mind could conceive of wisdom and of worth. He was a humble-minded child, lowly enough in every thought that regarded himself; but if he ever cherished

a latent spark of pride in his heart, it was when he thought of himself as the brother of Michael Hammond.

In all essentials, too, this elder brother merited well the devoted love of the younger. No father could have watched more scrupulously his interests than Michael had done. No mother more solicitously have cared for all the details of his suffering childhood. But all this was testified by Michael in deeds—not words. He was always kind to, but rarely fondled, the ailing sensitive child. Still he often had him with him, and beguiled many a tedious hour with cheerful conversation and manifestations of interest in his youthful and sedentary pursuits. In his own quiet way, Michael loved his little brother; but he often

wondered at, and even repulsed, the poor child's too earnest demonstrations of affection. In fact, he looked upon them as morbid symptoms, indicating weakness of mind and body.

Sybil Hammond resembled her brother Michael in her coldness of heart and reserved temper; but she had far less feeling for, and appreciation of, good in others than he possessed. She was quick-sighted to the faults and failings of those around, but often mistaken as to motives, her judgments being geuerally based upon the narrow foundation of her own experience, and the suggestions of a temper and disposition naturally calculating and exacting. In their relative position in the family, Sybil occupied a middle place between the elder and younger brothers, and

being only a child at the period of their parent's death, she had far less to do with the suffering infancy of Gabriel than the elder and more responsible brother. Though rather an indifferent sister, she was not at that time an unkind one, and little Gabriel, with his large capacity for loving and yearning after affection, bestowed a large portion of his own upon his sister Sybil. When he was barely ten years old she married, and quitted her brother's home for that of her husband in London; and after that event their intercourse was confined to the occasional visits of either family to town or country. The husband of Sybil, Mr. Palmer, was a man many years older than herself, but rich enough to be deemed an excellent match even for her, who had no inconsiderable share

of good looks to recommend her, as well as a portion of ten thousand pounds. She was indebted to her brother Michael's liberality for this doubling of her original fortune. He was also equally generous respecting Gabriel, considering it rather an act of justice towards the two surviving members of the once numerous family. He made but one stipulation, namely—that the money should remain in the bank, whilst he allowed a yearly income of five per cent. upon it. This arrangement was gladly acceded to, and Sybil's money remained in her brother's hands.

Michael Hammond was extremely well pleased with his sister's choice. He had long known and esteemed Mr. Palmer as a man of business in London, being a

merchant and bill-broker. Of the disparity of age he thought nothing, for Sybil was old in her youth—her beauty was of a cold, stiff character, and her occupations and amusements were quiet and sedate.

There was nothing objectionable in Mr. Palmer's manners or appearance, and he stood high in the mercantile world. He was much attached to his young wife, and they seemed happy, and well suited to each other.

It may be asked, what share had the heart of Sybil Hammond in this marriage? That none could tell; but no doubt she esteemed her husband, and fully appreciated all the advantages of the position in which he was able to place her.

Sybil was new to London, but none

ever heard her complain of the dulness of the large mansion in Bedford Square, where she found her married home; nor did the tediousness of her husband's elderly guests, whom he often assembled there, in any way annoy or weary her. She had no friends or connections of her own in London, and she naturally became habituated to that society to which he introduced her on her marriage. It was not a very lively life—but that at Holy-cross had not been much gayer; so, fortunately, Sybil, when she became the wife of Mr. Palmer, found no great difficulty in conforming herself to that mode of life most agreeable to him.

A year or two after her marriage a son was born to cheer the solitude to which her husband's pursuits frequently consigned

her. After that happy event, Mr. and Mrs. Palmer seemed to consider their cup of prosperity was filled to the brim.

The little Stephen Hammond Palmer was a remarkably handsome child, though his beauty, even in childhood, partook of the hard, cold style of his mother's; and as he grew older his features assumed an expression of formality and reserve that savoured of the set in which he was brought up, and the peculiarities of the families from which he sprung.

Stephen Palmer was sent to a public school; Westminster being chosen, that his parents might enjoy the pleasure of his society every Sunday, and on all other available opportunities. Thus, though Stephen benefited in some degree by his association with other boys, he was still


too much under the dominion of home influence to allow of any radical change being effected in his manners or habits of thinking. He passed, however, through his school career with tolerable credit; he had good abilities with a clear head, and application was not so distasteful to him as to many boys. His father looked forward with pride to the prospect of his son's attainments procuring for him a still higher position in the mercantile world than he himself already occupied, and reflecting fresh honour on the name of Palmer.

Mrs. Palmer, on her part, with equal pride in her son's talents, anticipated the period when he, in all probability, would be called to fill an equally important place in her own family, by also inherit-

ing his uncle Hammond's possessions and the old house at Holycross. This persuasion had been so often dwelt upon by Mrs. Palmer in the boy's hearing, that it was no wonder he grew up to consider that he should eventually succeed to his uncle's as well as to his father's property.

It may appear strange that Mrs. Palmer should so confidently indulge in such castle-building; but the fact was, that she had never been able to divest herself of the impression that Gabriel would not grow up to man's estate; and that, added to Michael's remaining unmarried, strengthened and established the idea in her own mind, as well as in that of her son.

CHAPTER III.

 TIME, however, passed on, and Gabriel Hammond, contrary to all prognostications, lived and grew up. He outlived, also, in great measure, the weaknesses of his childhood and youth; and though extremely fragile in appearance, and often hesitating in speech, he was not remarkable for any peculiarities of either. It is true, he still retained sufficient remembrance of his early infirmities to render him sensitively alive to such remains of them as he either

felt in himself or fancied were perceptible to others. This made him backward in addressing strangers, and, if called upon to do so, often caused him much nervous distress. The effect of this uncomfortable sensation was testified in a reluctance to enter general society, and to make or seek new acquaintances.

Gabriel Hammond, though far from handsome, was pleasing and gentlemanlike in appearance. Although diffident in manner and conversation, he was well-informed, had made good use of the abundant leisure forced upon him in early youth, and had given satisfactory evidence of the results in a successful, though quiet, career at the university.

Gabriel, on his return from college, took up his abode at his brother's

house as his permanent home, and was received by Michael into the banking firm as a junior partner, but subject to certain restrictions—the other senior partner being a gentleman of the name of Forster, who had succeeded to the position occupied by Mr. Newton, and left vacant by his death some years previous.

Amongst the various responsibilities which had devolved upon Michael, was the guardianship of the infant daughter of his former friend and partner, Mr. Newton. He was happily spared the most onerous part of the charge; as the personal care of the little Clara Newton was committed to a married sister of Mr. Newton's, whose deceased husband, Mr. Morris (a London solicitor), had been the co-trustee and guardian of the infant heiress.

Michael gladly devoted himself to the more congenial, and, to him, pleasing task of watching over and managing the large fortune left in his charge, to be retained, according to the father's directions, in the house of Hammond & Co., until his child should marry or come of age; the former event to be subject to the approval of her joint-guardians; and if deferred till after the period of her majority, the fortune was to remain in the hands of Mr. Hammond until his office was superseded by that important event.

Michael, being therefore relieved of all personal care of his ward, contented himself with making occasional visits to the house of Mrs. Morris when he was in London; and in that way kept up an acquaintance with the young heiress and

her aunt, who was, from past associations, well known both to him and his sister, Mrs. Palmer.

Everything connected with the Hammonds continued much the same for several years after Gabriel had been installed in the bank, and had taken his place in his brother's house. His chances of life then seemed almost as good as those of most around him; but as his early youth wore away, the predictions of his sister Sybil appeared likely to be verified, that both her brothers would live and die bachelors. No one could doubt that Michael was confirmed in that estate, and that he was so far removed from the weakness of falling in love, that those who had known the Hammonds best and longest had never heard of any woman finding favour in his

sight. The younger brother also seemed disposed to pursue a solitary path through life.

The nervous timidity and diffidence to which we have alluded, led Gabriel rather to shun than seek the society of those families from whose daughters he might advantageously have chosen a wife. This appeared to be a single trait of resemblance between the two brothers; for in all else they were as widely dissimilar in every taste and pursuit as it was possible for two men, of the same family and profession, to be. Gabriel had no real inclination for business; the details of it were opposed to his turn of mind and general habits; but he fulfilled his allotted part, and went through the daily routine required, and rejoiced when all was ac-

complished, and he was at liberty to seek his more congenial employment and amusements. Gabriel, although a literary, was by no means a deeply studious, man; but he was an elegant scholar, fond of music and painting, and retaining a lively pleasure in cultivating that love of botany and natural history which had beguiled the period of his earlier youth. He delighted still in birds and flowers, notwithstanding the contempt with which such tastes were regarded by his elder brother, who, though kindly tolerant in past years of all that served to interest and amuse his weary hours, now evidently considered many of Gabriel's pursuits and recreations beneath the dignity and unworthy the attention of a man of business and mature years. They lived amicably together, however, and


Gabriel Hammond had attained his thirtieth birthday before any change occurred in his brother's house; and then their sister returned to it, bringing with her her son, and only child.

A sad alteration had taken place in her circumstances and prospects in life. She had become a widow, and had recently lost not only her husband, but every remnant of the large fortune which she fondly hoped would have been her son's inheritance, and also have ministered to her own enjoyments during her life; but, alas! one of those sudden and overwhelming failures, but too frequent in the mercantile world, had occurred to the rich Mr. Palmer. The blow was too much for him—an attack of apoplexy ensued, death soon followed, and, in a week from

the time the first tidings of his misfortune reached him, he breathed his last.

Happily for Mrs. Palmer, she was not destitute, although everything belonging to her husband's property was swept away. Her own fortune remained untouched and secure in her brother's house, and now, at this terrible crisis, became a welcome provision for the impoverished mother and otherwise destitute son.

Michael Hammond performed his part of kindness towards his bereaved sister and nephew, by immediately offering both a home. The large old family mansion was well calculated to accommodate any members of it under such circumstances; and, without a moment's hesitation, Mrs. Palmer gladly accepted her brother's offer, and, with her son, took up her abode



there, as in former days. The arrangement seemed pleasant and satisfactory to all; and thus it was that Sybil returned to Holycross.

CHAPTER IV.



STEPHEN PALMER was about eighteen at the time of his father's death, and had just been removed from Westminster, preparatory to finishing his education at the university. It was certainly a terrible reverse to any one brought up with the expectations that he had been; but, like his mother and uncle, Michael Hammond, Stephen was not, even in those youthful days, in the habit of manifesting any strong emotion. He

applied himself at that time with quiet energy to looking over his late father's affairs, and in endeavouring to make himself master of the causes that had brought such utter and entire ruin on all his fair prospects, in the vain hope, it appeared, that something might yet be saved out of the wreck of so large a property. It was useless. The liabilities incurred in this speculation were as enormous as the profits would have been had it proved successful. It involved other houses of equal respectability as that of Palmer, and the astounding failure struck a panic through the commercial world. Stephen therefore found himself, as far as regarded his paternal inheritance, a beggar. He was wholly and entirely dependent on his mother and her family. His only ob-

servation, however, on becoming fully aware of his position was,

“Well! I have a fortune to make, it appears, before I can enjoy one.”

His mother replied,

“You seem to forget there are other fortunes which may be enjoyed besides the one you have lost.”

Stephen looked at his mother for a minute keenly, then said,

“Oh! my uncle Hammond’s, you mean; but, from what I have seen and heard of him, I do not think he is very likely to allow to others the enjoyment he denies himself, let his means be what they may.”

Mrs. Palmer contented herself with the brief reply,

“Not at present, certainly.”

Soon after their settlement at Holycross House, Mrs. Palmer began to consider what course would be most eligible for her son to pursue, in accordance with the means she possessed, and the plans she entertained for his future life. To do her justice, her son's welfare and worldly advancement was the one great purpose and object of her life. It is true she wished to keep him, for the present, dependent on herself. She rejoiced that her own fortune was not only untouched, but even increased. She held it entirely in her own hands, and with it the power of shaping her son's course. She proposed to him, therefore, or rather signified her wish, he should complete his unfinished education either with a private tutor, or at one of the universities, to which she would endeavour to send him if that suited

his inclinations better. After that time, she said, she expected his uncle would take him into the bank, on consideration of her money remaining there, though it was to be understood that it would be as much as ever in her own power.

To Mrs. Palmer's surprise, Stephen rejected both the university and tutor plan. He said he had already talked to his uncle about his prospects, and he had agreed with him that, if he wished to devote himself to a commercial life, he was sufficiently well-educated, having, he hoped, profited well by all the years he had spent at a public school. He would not, therefore, put his mother to any further expense on that head; and as he could not now go to college with the advantages he had hoped to possess, he

confessed he had rather remain at home.

Mrs. Palmer looked and felt angry at this summary rejection of her proposal, which she considered a very generous one in the present state of her finances; but it was an invariable rule with her never to permit herself to exhibit any ebullition of anger, whatever she might feel. After a moment's pause she asked him if it was his intention to sit down idle, and wait for anything that might, in the course of time, drop into his mouth.

"By no means, mother," returned the young man. "Idleness is as abhorrent to me as it can be to yourself; and where there is so much to be done, as in my case, every day and hour ought to be precious. I know nothing at present of

business, and have requested my uncle to take me as one of his clerks."

"Which I will not consent to," replied his mother. "You will enter your uncle's house as a partner, according to my agreement with him, and in no other way."

After a little more discussion with her brother and son, Mrs. Palmer carried her resolution into effect, and Stephen was sent to a private tutor for a couple of years; and, upon his return home, after that period, was, at his mother's request, taken by his uncle into the bank, as a junior partner.

Michael Hammond, however, never forgot the praiseworthy eagerness shown by his nephew to enter his house at the earliest opportunity, and in a subordinate

situation, had he been permitted to do so.

He was not a man of many words, but he expressed his satisfaction at finding so much of the hereditary spirit in Stephen's disposition, and the hopes he entertained of seeing him become an honour to both the families to which he belonged. Mrs. Palmer, considering this a favourable opportunity for ascertaining some of her elder brother's sentiments, remarked:

"Yes, poor boy! he is ready enough to work, but, I fear, there is not much to be hoped for now from the name of Palmer, and that of Hammond must look hereafter, of course, to Gabriel to uphold its mercantile reputation."

"Humph!" replied Michael. "I don't think the name will gain much credit

from Gabriel, as a man of business ; Stephen is far more cut out for one— young as he is.”

Mrs. Palmer was well pleased and satisfied with this remark, and merely murmured a few assenting words, and contented herself with endeavouring to keep this impression alive in Michael’s mind on every available opportunity.

It was impossible for two young men to be more dissimilar than this uncle and nephew, who were now associated with the elder brother in the bank, and domiciled in the same house.

There was barely a dozen years between the two, but Stephen was, in his habits, tastes, and pursuits an older man than his uncle Gabriel. He grew up as good-looking, even handsome, as he promised to

be in the days of his boyhood, and, though not tall, his figure was compact and active. His manners were remarkably quiet and self-possessed, and his whole bearing marked by a cool determination that promised well for the attainment of any object on which his mind was bent.

In spite of his avowed love of business it seemed more with him, at that time, to be looked upon as a means to a desired end, than with that intense and abstract delight in its details, which were to his elder uncle so captivating and absorbing, and afterwards became so to himself. Gabriel Hammond, on his part, was but too glad to resign to his nephew any share of his own responsibilities, which could be so disposed of, leaving him

more at liberty to follow his own amusements and pursuits.

Mrs. Palmer often endeavoured to draw her brother Michael's attention to the fact of Stephen's perseverance and energy, as contrasted with Gabriel's supineness in all matters of business; though, observing, as if in extenuation, she supposed Gabriel's remissness was, in part, the result of constitutional weakness, which produced a corresponding inertness of body and mind, and therefore to be expected and excused.

It happened one day Michael appeared at the usual dinner hour in a peculiarly captious and irritable mood. He had been very anxious to see and speak to Gabriel on business of importance, and during the whole day he had been absent.

Mrs. Palmer shook her head mysteriously and said little, but looked as if she thought much. She contented herself, however, with asking her brother whether she should ring for dinner, or wait for Gabriel.

The family party were then assembled preparatory to that repast, whilst Michael continued to walk up and down the room with his hands clasped behind his back, and his shoes creaking at every step.

“Wait !” he exclaimed—“what ! wait for Gabriel ! Why, I have now lost a whole day waiting for him, and see no reason why I should lose my dinner also !”

Mrs. Palmer rang the bell, and observed she thought Gabriel would hardly absent

himself till night without letting his brother know where he was.

Michael only returned a testy kind of grunt to this observation, and soon after they descended to dinner.

It was not the custom of the Hammond family to talk much or linger long at this meal. It was, therefore, soon concluded, and they afterwards re-assembled in the usual sitting-room upstairs, which overlooked the old-fashioned garden.

Stephen Palmer, who was occupied in conning over the county papers, remarked :

“I see there is a Horticultural Meeting at Stapleton Park to-day. No doubt my uncle Gabriel is gone there.”

“That’s it, no doubt !” exclaimed Mrs. Palmer. “Gabriel has such a passion for flowers, he must have gone there.”

“A passion for nonsense !” returned Michael, shortly. “Why can’t you say he likes flowers, Mrs. Palmer? I hate your passions, and such follies !”

One of Michael Hammond’s peculiarities was that since his sister’s marriage he had always addressed her by her married title, and never by her Christian name. Mrs. Palmer took his remark with perfect equanimity, only replying,

“I do not think the expression is too strong when applied to Gabriel, for I actually met him, the other day, in a broiling sun, carrying a root of fern in his hat, which he said he had found in the dry bed of some stream, and it was a great rarity. He looked as delighted as if it had been an ingot of gold.”

“Yes !” said Stephen carelessly ; “and

he paid an ingot of gold, or something like it, for some wonderful new plant the other day. It is certainly his hobby, if not a passion."

Michael turned his sharp grey eyes upon his nephew, and asked him what he meant by an ingot of gold.

"Oh! only something about five sovereigns, or so, I believe; but if it had been ten," he said, "he would have given it——"

"I did not believe him capable of such folly," said Michael, sharply. "Pray where is this precious plant—I must see it."

"Oh! it was purchased to give to Lady Linwood—you can see it at the Lodge any day."

"Really," observed Mrs. Palmer, bridling,

"I think it is very wrong in a woman of Lady Linwood's age leading Gabriel into such extravagancies and follies. I daresay he is gone with her and her party to-day, as the meeting is at Stapleton Park."

"Very likely," said Michael; "Lady Linwood has always been a kind friend to Gabriel since the days of his ailing childhood. I am sure she would never wish him to give five guineas for a trumpery flower."

"I think her nieces might, though," observed Stephen.

"What, those two girls," said Michael, "who are come to live with her—the Miss Grants? I know nothing about them."

"I have heard," replied Stephen, "their

father, Colonel Grant, was a reckless spendthrift, who died terribly in debt."

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Palmer, "and their mother, Lady Agnes, was no better, for I hear she half-ruined her husband by her extravagance in dress and equipage."

"The more the pity for the poor girls, then," returned Michael, more in perversity than kindness.

"And for their aunt also, I think," said Mrs. Palmer, "for I hear they are left totally unprovided for; and everyone knows her jointure is not a very large one—at least, it must be very insufficient to maintain two fine London young ladies in the way they have been used to live."

"Well, they must put up with what

they can get now, and be thankful," said Michael; "and the elder, I hear, is so handsome; I daresay she will soon be off her aunt's hands."

"Yes," said Stephen; "there is a talk already about her and that young Sir Arthur Stapleton. So, if they manage that, she will be pretty well provided for."

"Oh!" rejoined Mrs. Palmer, "many things are talked of which never come to pass; but that is another reason why they are all gone to this flower-show at Stapleton Park."

"They are very welcome to go," said Michael. "I only wish they would not have taken Gabriel with them just on this particular day when I want him at home, and have been expecting him every hour."

“I am afraid, sir,” observed Stephen, in his tone of business, “that I can be of no use to you in his place. If there is anything I can do, I will sit up to-night with pleasure.”

“Thank you, Stephen. No; you can do nothing in the business—it related to one of the Newton farms. I sent Gabriel the other day to look it over, and the tenant came to speak to me about it to-day, but I could say nothing, or give him any positive answer without Gabriel. I have expected him in all day, and the man and I have both lost our time and the day, which I particularly hate, and he lives twenty miles off.”

“Ah! said Mrs. Palmer, “what a fine property that must be now—I daresay it is immensely increased in value under

your judicious management, and such a long minority. Why, what an heiress Clara Newton will be! She must be old enough now to be introduced. I have not seen her these last three years—not since I left London,” with a sigh of remembrance.

“You can write and ask them here, if you want to see them,” said Mr. Hammond; “and it will save me a journey to London, for I have not been this year.”

“I should like it of all things,” returned Mrs. Palmer, with alacrity. “I do write occasionally to Mrs. Morris, and I am sure she would like to come to Holycross.”

“Not if it is attended with much trouble,” replied Michael, smiling grimly.

“Mrs. Morris will come if it suits her,

and not unless. Where is she now? Out of town, I suppose?"

"Yes, they are all at Ryde just now, I believe," said Mrs. Palmer; "they generally go there for two months in the summer."

"Well, then, when they return to London, you had better write to Mrs. Morris, and ask her if they will come and see us at the old house."

"I shall be delighted to do so; but I suppose I must ask them all?"

"All! of course; but whom do you mean by all?"

"Oh! only the companion cousin, Fanny Newton, who has lived with Mrs. Morris since her husband's death, and she never stirs without her. She says, Fanny Newton saves her no end of trouble, so I

must include her in the invitation to Mrs. Morris and Clara."

"By all means. There is plenty of room, I suppose, for the three ladies?"

"Oh! yes, plenty. I will ask them to come here in September. Stephen, do you remember pretty little Clara Newton?" said Mrs. Palmer, turning to her son; "she is only two or three years younger than you. You used to play together when you were quite little children."

"Yes, mother, I remember her," replied Stephen; but he added no more, probably owing to his having taken up an interesting book during the discussion between his mother and uncle.

The latter took out his watch, and began to wind it up, which was the recognized signal in the family for separa-

ting for the night. Mrs. Palmer therefore said no more, but she dreamed pleasant dreams.

CHAPTER V.



AT the further extremity of the town of Holycross, and at the opposite entrance to that by the common or green, stood a pleasant-looking residence, snugly enclosed in its own grounds, and nearly a quarter of a mile from any other dwelling-house. This place had formerly been known as Holycross Lodge, but on its purchase by a retired general officer, Sir Philip Linwood, he altered its appellation to that of Linwood Lodge, by which name it was

afterwards designated. This house was now occupied by his widow, a woman many years younger than himself. He had left the Lodge to her for her life, after which it was to become the property of her stepson, Captain Linwood.

This young man, like his father, having entered the army at an early age, was seldom to be seen at Holycross, although his visits to his stepmother there were amongst the most fondly desired and cherished incidents of her quiet and uneventful life.

Lady Linwood had no children of her own, and Henry Linwood, being little more than an infant at the time of her marriage with his father, had continued to fill the vacant place in her warm maternal heart; whilst he, on his part, regarded

her with affection, as the only mother he had ever known. After Henry grew up and left his home, Lady Linwood still extended her kindly interest and solicitude to the former friend and play-fellow of her stepson's early years, Gabriel Hammond. She had been attracted towards the poor boy after the death of his mother, in the days of his ailing and peculiarly suffering childhood; and when he became older and stronger, and able to profit by such notice, she invited him frequently to her own house, and gave him the benefit of her own bright and healthy boy's companionship, as well as the still greater advantage of her own gentle motherly care and superintendence.

This association was not without its

good effects on both the boys, as Gabriel was as decidedly superior in the depth and strength of his mental qualifications, as his young friend was in his bodily prowess and capabilities.

Michael Hammond was passive on the occasion. He perceived, however, that his young brother gained in health and cheerfulness from this frequent change from his own dreary habitation, and therefore permitted, if he did not absolutely encourage, this intimacy; and he had sense and good feeling enough to appreciate the benevolent disposition and intention of Lady Linwood.

On Gabriel's part, his childish love and veneration for his motherly protectress ripened into a deep and devoted friendship in after years—it was for long the

strongest and warmest sentiment of his heart. The innate refinement of his character delighted in all the gentle and endearing qualities with which Lady Linwood was peculiarly endowed; and for much of what was most valuable in his own character, he stood deeply indebted to the influence she exercised over him in early youth.

Often would he betake himself, when mentally perplexed or depressed, to this unfailing and judicious friend, to seek for strength and encouragement from her gentle wisdom and unfailing cheerfulness.

On Mrs. Palmer's return to Holycross, she saw and made her own observations on this friendship; but she understood it not, and, with all the bitterness of her own nature, was meanly jealous of Lady

Linwood's influence over her brother Gabriel. She took every opportunity of sneering at this affectionate devotion, which she stigmatised as ridiculous on his part, and unnatural and unkind towards his own family.

There was, as may be supposed, but little liking between Mrs. Palmer and Lady Linwood; and, although in the habit of meeting as neighbours occasionally, they neither of them sought the society of the other, except when civility might require them to do so.

Things had thus continued much the same for some years, till about a few months previous to the time of which we speak, when an important event occurred in Lady Linwood's life and domestic relations. Two orphan nieces came to


live with her—they were the children of her only brother, Colonel Grant, and at his death were, with their brother, left to make their way in the world with such assistance as their surviving friends and relations might be disposed to bestow upon them. They had also lost their mother, as Lady Agnes died two or three years before her husband. At his decease it was found that he had not only dissipated all his property, but was deeply in debt. The children were thus left penniless. The son, however, was provided for by a commission in the army, and a small allowance from his maternal uncle, Lord Carlton; whilst the two girls, Agnes and Lillian, immediately received a pressing invitation from their aunt, Lady Linwood, to make her house their home. This

offer, for the first year after their bereavement, the elder sister, Agnes, chose to decline for them both. She and Lillian had been, during that time, engaged in visiting from house to house, amongst their mother's relations; but they found a home in none, although there were many that Agnes would have considered more eligible, and better suited to her taste and inclination, than the retired one offered by their father's only sister.

Lady Linwood was, at that time, almost a stranger to the two girls whom she thus so generously desired to befriend.

Colonel Grant and Lady Agnes had lived so much abroad, when not in London, that they had but rarely visited Holycross, and of late years not at all.

Agnes was nearly four years older than




her sister Lillian, who was at that time just eighteen ; the brother Alexander coming between the two girls. Agnes was an acknowledged beauty, being tall and fair, and golden-haired, with fine features, and brilliant complexion. She was perfectly aware of all the claims she possessed to general admiration, and was never surprised at any amount of homage paid to her perfections. Her manners were particularly formed and self-possessed ; she had been at the head of her father's house since her mother's death, and constantly living in the gayest society at home and abroad, from the time she quitted the school-room.

Lillian was graceful and pretty, with soft hazel eyes and pale, clear complexion, but less striking in appearance

than her elder sister. She was also naturally more retiring in manner, and thought more of her sister's beauty than of that which so many discovered in herself.

To both these girls just entering life, it was a terrible reverse which they experienced in the loss of their father, and with him, of the fair prospects they had hitherto enjoyed. It fell with twofold severity upon Agnes, who was already playing so pleasurable and successful a part in the gay world; whilst Lillian had as yet been but hardly introduced into it. At first Agnes clung to the vain hope of retaining her former position in society, by making her home in some of the stately mansions of her mother's relations. This expectation failing, she turned at last,



somewhat reluctantly, it must be confessed, to her aunt Mary and Linwood Lodge. Upon their arrival there, Lillian was far more pleased with all she saw than her sister Agnes; although even *she* confessed they might have done worse than find themselves in so pleasant a home, however quiet it might prove, and with such a chaperon as their aunt.

Lady Linwood's refined appearance and manners satisfied Agnes's fastidious taste, and made her regard her aunt with a degree of partiality which all the essential benefits conferred by her might have failed to ensure.

"We shall find this place and neighbourhood dull, I daresay," said the beauty, as the two sisters strolled together about the pretty garden and grounds, a few

mornings after their arrival. "But Aunt Mary is very nice in every way, and this is a very complete little *ménage*, with every comfort and luxury, although not quite so gay and grand as many we have been accustomed to; but we must make the best of things, and shall get on, no doubt, very well."

"I don't think that will be very difficult with Aunt Mary, and in such a charming house and gardens as these are," replied Lillian. "Oh! how I love a garden! and one like this, where we may pick as many flowers as we please, without the fear of fine gardeners before our eyes, and everything as stiff and formal as it is at Carlton Castle."

"But Carlton is not a place to be despised, though," returned Agnes; "and I

confess my taste inclines rather to the magnifique than to the picturesque; but there is something very taking, notwithstanding, in this sort of large, irregular cottage building, with a room added here and there, and its odd gables and old chimneys, and windows of all sizes and shapes; and then all incongruities gracefully draped and veiled by the mantle of creepers and ivy with which the whole house is so profusely clothed. Everything within is just as nice, and in perfect keeping and comfort. I always judge of people by the appearance of the room they constantly occupy—it is as sure an index of their taste and habits as the letters they write, or the books they read! I have come to the conclusion that Lady Linwood and her

habitation are perfectly unexceptionable."


Whilst Agnes thus declaimed, Lillian occupied herself with gathering a large bouquet (one of her favourite amusements), and then, running in, begged her aunt to allow her henceforth to supply the vases in the drawing-room with their fragrant contents, or at least give her leave to share her employment in so doing. Lady Linwood readily granted this petition, for she was pleased to find that Lillian's love for flowers was equal to her own; whilst, it may be observed, she possessed many of her peculiar tastes and fancies, and strongly resembled her also in person and disposition. The aunt and niece had not been many days together before there sprang up between them a strong feeling of

preference, which gradually deepened into the warmest affection on either side.

Agnes, meanwhile, made herself as happy as possible under the circumstances. She possessed that fortunate kind of temperament which is not easily depressed, and that perfect reliance on her own merits, which led her to hope they would eventually meet with their due reward. She turned her attention chiefly to consider the capabilities of the locality in which her lot seemed to be cast, and to see what could be done, or hoped for, in the way of amusement and advantage from it.

Lady Linwood had, since her long widowhood, entered very little into general society; but she was well known and much liked in the neighbourhood, and Agnes,

as her niece, found little difficulty in securing willing chaperons, with an ample share in all that might be going on in the way of gaiety. Miss Grant also displayed the most decided talent in making acquaintances for herself, and getting invitations from distant places when she found it desirable to do so; and effectually succeeded at last in exciting her aunt's astonishment at some of her proceedings. It was not very long before her beauty attracted the attention and admiration of Sir Arthur Stapleton, of Stapleton Park—the greatest matrimonial *parti* at that time available in the neighbourhood of Holycross—a young man of good family, with some reported ten thousand a year. Agnes played her part so well, and followed up every advantage




she gained so successfully, that, in the course of six months after her arrival at Linwood Lodge, she had the satisfaction of receiving an offer of marriage from him, and, without hesitation, returned a favourable answer to his proposals.

The prospect of this union appeared to give much pleasure to the families on both sides. Sir Arthur's mother, Lady Anne Stapleton, expressed her satisfaction that her son's choice should have fallen on one so well worthy of it as the beautiful and fascinating Miss Grant, whose connections were well known to Lady Anne, and perfectly approved of by her. So there was nothing left to be desired in the contemplated match. The want of money in the bride-elect was happily of no consequence, and Agnes had every reason to be satisfied

with the reception she met with from the various members of her future husband's family.

It was with a feeling of considerable relief that Lady Linwood heard of her niece's engagement and intended marriage with Sir Arthur Stapleton. She had with some degree of consternation witnessed her perfectly independent proceedings since she had become an inmate of her house, and felt thankful that the mockery of any supposed responsibility on her part was so happily at an end. She knew but little personally of Sir Arthur, but that little was in his favour, and, in a worldly point of view, she believed the connection was all that could be desired for her penniless niece. Had it been otherwise, she felt how futile any remonstrances from her[^]



might have proved ; and, therefore, that everything was so unexceptionable, was indeed a subject of rejoicing to Lady Linwood.


“ I knew you would be glad,” said Agnes, “ for you have been the kindest and most patient of aunts to me. You must rejoice in the prospect of being so honourably rid of such a torment, as I must have been, in this quiet little place—coming and going, hither and thither, at all hours, and turning everything topsy-turvy!—and you and Lillian keeping the even tenor of your way all the time ; and, above all, though mine have been so different from yours, you have never once looked cross, or preached to me about my goings on.”

“ I do not think, my dear,” replied

Lady Linwood, with a kind smile, "that any preaching, as you call it, of mine would have been of much avail."

"You are quite right; I am sure it would not. I fear I am past praying for, as regards the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and have no wish or intention of renouncing them at present. Do not be shocked, dearest aunt; I have drawn a prize, and can't help being glad. I am really fond of Sir Arthur, and like him all the better that he can place me in such a position in the world as I wish to occupy."

"Well, dear, only remember that position entails its own share of responsibilities—you will not forget them!" said Lady Linwood, half pleadingly, for she was but too well aware that her elder niece



took a very one-sided view of things in general.

“Oh! certainly, Aunt Mary,” replied Agnes, promptly. “I am quite aware that there will be plenty of people to expect things from me, and that no end of demands will be made upon me. Lady Anne Stapleton has been already talking to me about her schools and charities; but, of course, I shall use my own judgment in regard to all of them, and act accordingly.”

“Poor Lady Anne!” said Lillian, “she must feel leaving such a charming place, and all the people she has lived amongst so long. I am quite sorry for her, though glad for you, dearest.”

“Don’t waste your pity on Lady Anne,” said her sister, coolly. “It is only the

fate of dowagers in general. She has always expected to leave the place as soon as Sir Arthur married; so it's nothing new to her, or her daughters, and, I must say for Lady Anne, she resigns with a good grace, and seems well satisfied that I should reign in her stead."

"Oh! yes," exclaimed Lillian. "She quite won my heart by the way she spoke of you, Agnes, dear; and she seemed so pleased that you liked and admired everything at the park so much, and said that you had desired that nothing should be altered there."

"Ah!" said Agnes, laughing, "I would not allow Sir Arthur to new furnish the house *before* our marriage, because his mother would have done it all, or had a voice in it; and I choose, therefore, to

wait till afterwards—it is only a pleasure postponed. You will find me very busy on my return.”

“On your return!” repeated Lillian, sadly. “When will that be? I shall rejoice to see you back.”

“Oh! you will see plenty of me, my dear, and be a great deal with me at Stapleton, though I would not take you from Aunt Mary entirely. You suit each other exactly, and then,” to her aunt, “situated as we are, I should hesitate at present about taking Lillian altogether to live with me. I have heard too many remarks made about a man’s marrying his wife’s family to incur the risk of any such observations being applied to me and mine. Not but that if I chose to propose such

a plan Sir Arthur would not be delighted to accede to it."

Lillian's delicate cheek flushed through the tears that were not yet dry upon it, and she hastened to assure her sister that she had never contemplated such a step, and that she had much rather remain with her aunt, who had been so kind to them both when they were without a home.

"Yes," said Lady Linwood, kissing Lillian; "and now you have made that home so much happier and more cheerful than it has been for years past, I could not bear to think of parting with you, as well as Agnes."

"I fear, my dear aunt," said the imperturbable Agnes, "that I have not contributed as much to the comfort of

your home as I might have done; but I shall hope to make myself pleasanter on the occasion of my future visits, when I shall have more time to devote to others, and shall not be so full of myself and my own affairs."

It may be supposed, however, from that time to the day of her marriage, which took place as soon as possible, that Agnes Grant was more self-engrossed than ever. Happily for Lady Linwood, it came to an end in due time—the period of courtship was over, and the wedding-day arrived at last.

There was a very gay party assembled at Linwood Lodge to do all honour to the occasion, as Lady Linwood had invited many of the neighbouring families to the *déjeûner* she gave after the wedding guests

returned from church. She wished to have included her nephew, Alexander Grant, amongst those assembled to celebrate this happy event, and had desired her nieces to write and invite their brother.

To her surprise and Lillian's great disappointment, Agnes very coolly negatived her aunt's proposition, saying it would be a pity to bring her brother all the way from Ireland, where his regiment then was quartered, and put him to the expense of such a long journey on her account. On Lady Linwood's kindly suggesting that the expenses might be arranged for him, Agnes decidedly begged her aunt not to encourage her brother, who was naturally wild and extravagant, in the habit of looking to others for assistance on every chance of amusement that might

present itself in the family. It was evident that Agnes did not intend to sanction any such expectations on her own account; but the remark, and consequent exclusion of her brother, savoured more of worldly wisdom than of sisterly affection, and fell coldly on Lady Linwood's warm heart. She had been prepossessed in her nephew's favour when she had seen him for a short time in London, on going there to fetch his sisters to their new home.

She had been struck at that time by his likeness to her brother, and was concerned to hear, from the observations of his sisters, that these were also less desirable traits of resemblance between the father and son.

She had, however, the consolation of

seeing her stepson on this occasion, as he arrived almost unexpectedly the evening before the wedding-day. Lady Linwood was pleased to see the evident admiration with which he regarded Lillian, and he assured her that he considered her a thousand times more attractive than the beautiful bride.

There could, notwithstanding, be little difference of opinion as to Agnes's claims on general admiration the next morning, when she actually appeared in that character, and everyone present agreed it was impossible to see a more graceful vision than that presented by her on the occasion.

Everything went off well—the day was a bright glowing August summer morning, the assembled party was numerous, the

bride easy and self-possessed, without testifying any distressing nervous timidity; whilst her adieux to the friends she was leaving were made with the same happy calmness and composure that had marked her conduct during the ceremony that preceded them.

In the midst of all, Henry Linwood was occupied in observing how deeply Lillian (and she alone) felt the parting. During the day she had been the principal object of his attention and admiration, and he had exerted himself to relieve her of many of her little cares and duties towards the guests, thus leaving her at liberty to devote herself to her sister till the moment of her departure. This gave rise to a very friendly feeling on Lillian's part towards Captain Linwood, especially when

he talked to her of Agnes after she was gone.

Gabriel Hammond was standing by the side of his old friend, Lady Linwood, whilst her attention was directed to the pair; and perceiving that his eyes also were earnestly bent on them, she exclaimed,

“I see what you think, and others too, for I have heard some observations and surmises on the subject, which I have only laughed at; but *to you*, I may say, I should rejoice if time verifies them.”

“Yes,” replied Gabriel, slowly; “I can understand what you feel. But Henry—Linwood—his profession?”

“That would not stand in his way; you know I have always told him, when he marries, he must leave the army, and

come and live here—it shall be his own home—he shall not have to wait for my death, dear boy! I must see him happy, if possible, before that.”

“Ah! yes; and he looks very happy now—and—he will be—must be—most happy!”

As Gabriel let fall these few sentences, he spoke almost as slowly, and with as great an effort, as in those early days so well remembered by Lady Linwood, when speaking was so painful to him. She looked at him earnestly for a moment, then said kindly,

“You are tired, Gabriel—you have been doing too much of late—you look quite ill. Now go home, and rest yourself, and then come back, and dine with me and the few friends staying here—we shall

have no party besides. I find this great breakfast quite enough for one day for such a quiet person as I am, and I dare say for you too."

"Yes," replied Gabriel; "I am very good-for-nothing, as usual—quite unfit for society, as I have often told you, my kind friend."

"Now, Gabriel, the old story over again. I have no time to scold you now; but stay, if you prefer it, and tire yourself a little longer. I shall be very glad of your company."

"Yes, you are always good to me, but nobody else will be glad if I stay."

"Nonsense!—you are a perverse, naughty boy—there! Go and talk to Lillian, and your old playfellow—they at least will be glad of your company."

"I fear not, dear lady. I feel stupid and tongue-tied this afternoon—you must perceive it. I can hardly utter——"

"Well, go home and rest. See, all the people are going. I cannot talk to you any longer now. Come back to dinner."

"Are you coming with us, Gabriel?" said Mrs. Palmer, in her most dulcet tones, as she drew near to make her parting little speech of congratulation to Lady Linwood; "we are going now."

Then slipping her hand into his arm, she led him with her to the carriage, where Mr. Hammond and Stephen Palmer were already seated. The distance was short, but there was a crowd of carriages, and they were obliged to drive slowly home.

"There, thank goodness that is over

and done with!" exclaimed Michael, as he drew up the glass, notwithstanding the heat of the day; but as if with the intention of shutting out the outer world as much as possible.

"Weddings are always stupid things," observed Stephen; "except to the people concerned; and they are generally in a hurry to have it over, and get away as soon as possible, and look bored and nervous."

Mrs. Palmer laughed scornfully at this remark of her son's.

"I never saw a less timid bride in my life than Miss Grant. She has, I really think, more assurance than I ever beheld in any young woman before. Sir Arthur looked quite astonished, and no wonder!"

"Lady Stapleton is very beautiful," faltered out poor Gabriel

"Of course," replied Mrs. Palmer, spitefully, "Lady Linwood's niece must be something very superior in your eyes, Gabriel. I hope you don't call the other girl beautiful, like her sister?"

"What, Lillian Grant? Oh! no."

"I am glad you own *that*; and certainly they are not alike, at all events. Pray, did any of the Stapleton party speak to you? Lady Anne brushed by quite close to me, and only just bowed to Mr. Hammond. Such airs!"

"None of them spoke to me," replied Gabriel.

"And yet you spent a day there, that famous Horticultural Show, when you played truant. They might have remembered you."

"I only went as one of Lady Lin-

wood's party, and they knew nothing about me."

"They might have done so, I think," said Mrs. Palmer, loftily; "everybody about here knows the name of Hammond and Sir Arthur Stapleton as well as anyone."

"Not out of the bank, I daresay," interrupted Michael, testily. "There, let me out. We are at home now; and I shan't go to any more weddings, till I go to—*yours*, Gabriel."

And then, seemingly excessively delighted and amused at such a funny notion, Mr. Hammond recovered his temper and got out of the carriage, chuckling to himself. Mrs. Palmer followed, simpering; and Gabriel also, looking extremely annoyed, walked after them.

Stephen was the last to enter the house, and he looked rather inquisitively at his younger uncle as he passed him in the hall, and, with a scrutinizing air, observed :

“You don’t think *that* such an improbable event, Uncle Gabriel, as they do, apparently?”

Gabriel’s pallid face flushed quickly, and his speech became painfully halting as he replied :

“If I do—if I *did*—that is—you see—I should be a fool—they laugh at such an idea—so do you, no doubt.”

“Me! not I,” said Stephen, indifferently. “It is nothing to me—but the supposition, as suggested by my uncle Michael, was a new one.”

Gabriel, contrary to his usual compo-

sure, answered with nervous excitement, and hastily, saying :

“What! of the possibility of anyone ever liking me well enough to marry me?”

“You are trying to mystify me now, uncle Gabriel. I daresay you know much more on that subject than I can pretend to do. So it must be a very good joke to you,” replied Stephen, boldly venturing on the remark, as a species of feeler in the delicate debate.

“A joke!” replied his uncle. “What jest have I ever made or implied? Do I laugh or make merry? Are my infirmities fit subject for such a feeling?”

“Good heavens! Uncle Gabriel, who ever dreamt of such a thing? My uncle

Michael laughs at matrimony because he never was inclined to commit himself in that way; but I really see no reason why you and I should think it needful to follow his example. Now, to tell you my opinion honestly in this matter——”

“Hush! — hush!” exclaimed Gabriel, stopping his nephew’s confidence. “Do not say another word on the subject—I do not desire it. My brother Michael has, no doubt, full and sufficient reasons for all and everything he says and thinks. I do not wish to hear any opinion at variance with his.”

“Oh! to be sure!” replied Stephen, carelessly. “I will say nothing more—it is no business of mine. Only I think you and I mean different things—we are at cross purposes!”

“I think we are,” replied Gabriel, in a dejected tone; “but say no more about it.”

And the uncle and nephew separated.

CHAPTER VI.



GABRIEL did not avail himself of Lady Linwood's invitation to return to the Lodge and dine there. He went immediately to his own room, where he remained for the rest of the day, excusing himself also from joining the family dinner; it was not an uncommon proceeding with him, when fatigued in body, or mentally depressed.

"Gabriel is soon knocked up," said Mrs. Palmer, with a severe aspect, as she helped

the soup ; “he really ought to exert himself a little more.”

“He finds it difficult,” answered Michael, “to forget he has been an invalid for the greater part of his life—any one may see, too, he is not over-strong even now.”

“I do not think,” observed Stephen, “that my uncle Gabriel is really so much fatigued as he is annoyed at the remark you made about his wedding.”

“About his what?” exclaimed Michael, who had quite forgotten his own pleasantry by that time.

“I mean your treating the idea of such an event as an improbability. And who knows but that it may be a tender subject with him?”

“Then pray let us have none of your tender nonsense here, boy. Why, I believe

you will be taking some such notions into your head next!—see what comes of gadding about, and going to weddings!”

“Well, sir,” replied Stephen, quietly, “all in good time. I see no harm in my thinking about marrying when I am able to afford it——”

“Ay, when you are,” interrupted his uncle.

“Like my uncle Gabriel,” said Stephen, finishing his sentence.

“How do you know that Gabriel *can* afford it? I don’t, I’m sure—unless, indeed, he has the good luck to meet with a fortune; so you are much upon a par at present, in that respect, as far as I can see.”

“Not quite—at least, during my lifetime,” observed Mrs. Palmer, stiffly.

“Well, we won’t dispute about it,” said Michael, shortly, “for the discussion, as far as I can see, is very uncalled for just now—pray, have you fixed any time for Mrs. Morris and the Miss Newtons coming to see us?”

“Yes; I heard from Mrs. Morris this morning; they cannot come till the beginning of September—they do not leave the Isle of Wight till the end of this month.”

“And this is the second week in August,” observed Michael. “Where are they staying?—at Ryde?”

“No, Ventnor. Mrs. Morris says it is so much quieter than Ryde during the season.”

“Ah, I understand,” said Michael—“people buzzing about the heiress already; no doubt that won’t suit Mrs. Morris, who

still likes to be first thought of everywhere."

"How *can* you tell that, Michael? I should not think it likely," observed his sister, with an affectation of candour and charity, not very common to her.

"Oh! I can see some things," returned Michael, with a twinkle in his little shrewd grey eyes; "it is not difficult to find out, from what she says, that Mrs. Morris considers the guardianship of her niece in the light of an infliction rather than a pleasure; she has told me as much, and how much she dreads having to go out with her, having lived so quietly for some years past, which is natural enough, no doubt, and Mrs. Morris is a very good woman in her way, I daresay, but she would prefer having only her own self to take care of and think about."

"How I hate selfishness!" remarked Mrs. Palmer, with virtuous indignation.

"So do most people—in their neighbours," returned her brother.

Whilst Stephen hazarded the observation that if such was the case with Mrs. Morris and her niece, the sooner the latter provided herself with another home the better for both.

Michael looked up at the young man for a moment, and then said:

"Ay, but there are more voices than one, luckily, to that question. *I am* guardian to the heiress, as well as her aunt. She can't marry without my consent, and I'll do my duty to her, and fulfil my promise to her late father, to the best of my ability."

"I have not the least doubt of it,"

observed Mrs. Palmer, blandly. "You are one who will consult your ward's *true* interests in the most conscientious manner; and luckily with her money need be no consideration."

"I differ from you there," said Michael, dryly. Then rising from the table, he said, with a look of satisfaction, "I have a good deal of business to do this evening—letters to write for the West Indian mail; and here are the invoices to look over, which will take some time. Come, Stephen, as Gabriel has gone to bed, you can help me."

"I shall be delighted," said Stephen, with a look and manner so perfectly in accordance, that his uncle gave him a slight genial tap on the shoulder, with the remark:

“There is some of the right stuff in you, boy, at all events. You’ll do well some day, notwithstanding past misfortunes; only don’t go heiress-hunting at present, or trying any short cuts to fortune—keep straight along the beaten road, and you’ll be rich enough in due time.”

In the meanwhile, Gabriel’s non-appearance at the Lodge disappointed his friends there; and the next morning, as Lady Linwood was strolling in the garden with her stepson, whilst Lillian was busy writing to her sister, she observed:

“Do go to-day, Henry, and see why Gabriel did not dine with us. I am afraid he is ill, he looked so wan yesterday.”

“Ah! I was wondering what ailed him, poor fellow!—he looked so dismal.

Good old Gabriel! I wanted to have seen him again."

"Then go there to-day, and call upon him. I know it will please him."

"I would, mamma, dear, with pleasure, if I were sure of not seeing or being seen by that Mrs. Palmer. You know she is one of my pet aversions; but tell me about Gabriel—has he been laid up, or anything the matter again?"

"No, indeed, he has been better, and doing a good deal for himself lately; but he seemed suddenly to break down yesterday. You know how sensitive he is, and then he was seized with one of his extremely depressing fits of nervous diffidence. I have often endeavoured to rouse him, and persuade him to try and shake them off. I attribute it, in great measure, to the

recollection of his early infirmities, which at times seems to oppress him quite painfully even now."

"I am sorry for him, dear. You know I have a great regard for old Gabriel, though I cannot understand him."

It was very true that Captain Linwood could not. He had rarely felt sick or sad during his life, and could not sympathise with one whose lot had been cast so differently. Nor could it be expected that there was much real companionship, even when boys together. Still, no doubt they both entertained feelings of liking and mutual regard, which were far the strongest on Gabriel's side.

Henry Linwood, though two or three years younger than Gabriel Hammond, was always the leader and superior in all

their amusements; but being a bright, bold, active boy, he could have little in common with the poor, pale, delicate youth whom Lady Linwood cherished so kindly, and who looked up to him with wonder and admiration. Of late years, and since Gabriel had outgrown so many of his juvenile weaknesses, their paths had led in very opposite directions. Still, there was mutual regard, and the tie of early association between them, whenever they did meet. Henry Linwood was ready to show Gabriel any kind attention that did not interfere in the least with his own comfort or convenience; he was a thorough man of the world, agreeable, and much liked in society, therefore it was not likely he should care much for that of Gabriel Ham-

mond. Still he was good-natured, although selfish, and he would rather give pleasure than pain; but he would not take much trouble in doing so—he therefore declined calling upon his old school-fellow.

“Well, I will try and make him come here instead,” said his step-mother.

“Then it must be to-day or to-morrow, mamma dear; for after that I am off.”

“You don’t mean that,” said Lady Linwood, much disappointed on various accounts; “I had quite set my heart on a nice comfortable visit from you; and now,” continued she, smiling, “that there is something young and pleasant at the Lodge, I hoped you might have been tempted to stay.”

“Raison de plus, dear mamma, for my speedy departure. Yes!” exclaimed he, more seriously, “Lillian Grant is the sweetest, nicest little creature in the world; and were I to stay, I should no doubt be guilty of the folly of falling in love with her.”

“Why call it folly, dear Henry?”

“Because I cannot afford to marry her, even if she would have me. Yes, dear, I know all you would say, all your kindness about making a home with you, but,” laughing, “we need not talk seriously, as I have not the least wish or intention of marrying at present.”

“Then you have quite made up your mind to run away the day after to-morrow?”

“I must, dear; for in truth I am due in Scotland for the twelfth.”

“Then there is an end of it all,” said poor Lady Linwood, trying to speak gaily, though her heart felt rather sad; but she never teased her friends to do what they would rather not, and she never felt hurt or vexed on such occasions. She was better satisfied that they should be pleased in the way that suited them best. Owing to this unselfish spirit, she had always retained her hold on her step-son’s affections; he might certainly have done more to contribute to her happiness, had he taken the trouble; but Lady Linwood never wished him either to write to her, or to visit her, except it was a pleasure to him to do so.

Had her affection for Henry Linwood been of a more exacting nature, the band between the two would have been soon

broken. As it was, he loved her as if she were his own mother; he had never known any other, and she required nothing from his affection. He was always as sure of a warm welcome, whether he had been months or years absent. She did not ask whether he *could* have come before; it was enough for her that he *was* come. Lady Linwood, in fact, always retained the friends she had once made; for she did not fall into the egotistical error that so many do, who live a secluded life, and imagine themselves deserted by the world in general. She did not suppose, because she loved retirement, that others were to step out of their way to seek her in it, and if they did not do so, complain that she was forgotten and forsaken. No; her friends found her always as they had

left her, and ready to receive them with the same cheerful, contented heart and mind. Thinking even more of others than of herself, she was happily exempted from the constant worries and affronts which agitate the more exacting and susceptible portion of the world. On the present occasion, she heard with fortitude the answer that overturned her new raised hopes, and scattered her wishes to the winds.

“Aunt Mary!” exclaimed Lillian, a day or two after, when they met in the garden, and springing from her low seat on the turf, as Lady Linwood approached—
“Aunt Mary, whilst you have been away Mr. Gabriel Hammond has been here; he is only just gone—did you meet him? He hoped to have seen Captain Linwood,

and was disappointed to hear that he has left you."

"No; I am sorry I did not see Gabriel. Why did not he stay till my return?"

"He said he was obliged to go to the bank this afternoon—that dreadful bank, aunt! He has been ill the last day or two, or he would have been here before. I was quite sorry to see him look so ill."

"Where did you see him, dear?"

"Oh! here, in the garden. I suppose they would not have let him in if he had come round to the front door and you away; but he came the short way through the little plantation, and I was sitting here, and I spoke to him before he saw me, so there was no retreat, you

know, aunt. And I like him so much when he is not in one of his shy, nervous fits, for then I can't get on with him."

"How did you manage to-day?"

"Oh! very well; he brought a choice plant for your fernery, Aunt Mary, and then we talked of flowers, and he forgot to be shy, and we got on so well—he knows so much! And then I told him how ill my canary was, and he came in and prescribed for it, and did not laugh at my anxiety, as Captain Linwood had the cruelty to do. Do come and see how much better my little Bijou is, for the warm bath he administered, as well as prescribed."

And Lillian ran into the drawing-room, her aunt following, and observing, with

admiring eyes, how pretty and graceful Lillian looked as she took her pet from its cage and fondled it, the little creature nestling with its beak to her rosy lips. It was, indeed, a pretty picture, and one that was very faithfully committed to paper that very evening, in a certain quaint old room in the ancient house that stood in the market-place at Holy-cross.

“I wish Henry had seen poor Gabriel,” said Lady Linwood after a pause, when she had settled herself with her work in her usual arm-chair.

“Yes, it seems a pity,” returned Lillian, who had seated herself on a stool at her aunt’s feet. “I thought Mr. Hammond looked hurt that Captain Linwood was gone, and had never been to see

him; he ought to have gone, Aunt, for old acquaintance sake—don't you think so?"

"Yes, and I told Henry so; I begged him to call on Gabriel, but he pleaded his well-known antipathy to Mrs. Palmer as an excuse for not doing as I asked him; and young men, you know, Lillian, will go their own way, and no other; so there was no help for it."

"I see, Aunt Mary; you did what you could; and I hardly wonder at any one not liking Mrs. Palmer. I have a perfect dread of her, that I cannot explain or account for; I think she would be so terribly spiteful if she took a dislike to anyone; and then there always seems to me something so very hollow in her smiles and her civilities. I saw her

looking at poor Agnes on her wedding-day, and I thought of the evil eye that we used to hear so much of in Italy."

"Poor Mrs. Palmer! she is not quite so formidable as you paint her, I hope, Lillian. I confess I do not like her much, but I pity her, too; for she has had great reverses and troubles, and has borne up well under them; but no doubt she feels it, as well as her son."

"I am sorry for them, Aunt Mary, but do not like either one or the other. What a pity it is that Mr. Gabriel Hammond should have such unpleasant relations! How comes he to be so different from them all?"

"There is a great deal of good though,

Lillian, in the elder Mr. Hammond; I have the greatest respect for him."

"Yes, he may be good, but I am sure he is not agreeable. What a dreadful family party they must be! I don't wonder your Mr. Gabriel often looks so depressed and unhappy, living amongst them all."

"He sees them with very different eyes from yours, Lillian. He is, however, most unlike them all, and there can be no real sympathy of taste or feeling amongst them. But I do believe Gabriel thinks his brother Michael the finest character that ever existed on earth, and that it is a privilege to belong to him, and to live under the same roof."

Lillian opened her pretty eyes in surprise, but only said, "Strange indeed!

but comforting, so I need not pity him
so very much. Now, aunt, shall I read
to you? ”

CHAPTER VII.



THE morning beams of a bright September sun were struggling through the dingy blinds of a cheerless-looking dining-room in one of the large dull houses in Wimpole Street, and after penetrating with difficulty into the interior of the apartment, fell with very diminished lustre on a breakfast-table where two ladies were seated. As it glanced impartially on both, it was impossible to see a more striking contrast than that which they presented to each

other. The elder of the two, who sat behind the tea-urn, appeared to have done her part and fulfilled her duty in making the tea, and to be waiting in expectation of further orders, for she made no attempt to pour it out, or to begin her breakfast.

She was a lady of dubious age—not old, certainly—neither was she youthful, though hardly middle-aged, and, being remarkably plain, it was of less importance to ascertain the precise number of her years; but should we name some four or five-and-thirty, we shall have guessed pretty accurately. Fanny Newton (for it was the companion cousin) would have freely confessed this to any one interested in making the inquiry. She was perfectly aware, also, that, with very common-place fea-

tures, a freckled complexion and sandy hair (that rebelliously went its own way), she had never possessed the smallest claims to good looks, even in her youthful days; nor did the knowledge of this fact occasion Fanny a single uneasy hour. She thought very little about it, and did not even suspect, what was obvious to all who knew her, that the kind, candid expression of her countenance made her plain face seem pleasant in the eyes of many, and that her unpretending and cheerful manners carried a sensation of ease and comfort with them, which made Fanny Newton generally welcome, especially where there were good and useful offices to be performed.

The younger lady was as different as possible in appearance and position from her

companion—being an extremely pretty girl of eighteen, an heiress, with good looks, good spirits, and all the good things in possession and expectation that this world can bestow. Clara Newton had, indeed, received her portion in pleasant places, and the world, no doubt, looked bright enough in her young eyes.

She, like her cousin, on the morning in question, sat also in an attitude of expectation; but not so patiently as her friend, for, having packed her travelling bag and altered the position of its contents some dozen times, she at last exclaimed,

“Do pour the tea out, Fanny? I have sat here nearly an hour, and have a hundred things to do before we go.”

The cousin, however, remonstrated.

“Wait a little, dear—just a few minutes longer; Cousin Kitty will be down directly—there, I hear her voice upon the stairs; we will stop till she comes in.”

“Aunt Morris takes everything so deliberately,” said the beauty. “She knows the train won’t wait for us, and yet she will not hurry herself in the least, and we shall all have to bustle at the last moment, which I so much dislike. Now, Fanny, here she is!”

The lady thus announced made her leisurely appearance, and whilst she seats herself at the breakfast-table we can observe her. She is good-looking still. Mrs. Morris enjoyed the reputation of having been handsome in the days of her youth, but was at that time a large indolent-looking woman, who, without being

absolutely vulgar, never failed to give an impression of want of refinement, both in general appearance and expression of countenance. She was a narrow-minded person, with an excellent opinion of her own qualifications—quietly and systematically selfish. She was vain and weak, and yet her perceptions were so obtuse that she had not the least idea of concealing her sentiments, or supposing them in any way questionable or objectionable.

Mr. Hammond was quite right when he said that she looked upon the guardianship of her heiress niece as a heavy burden imposed by the fates! notwithstanding the liberal allowance with which the responsibility was accompanied, and in some measure lightened.

She enjoyed robust health in general,

but made the most of the lightest ailment, as something to talk about connected with self.

Her worldly circumstances were extremely prosperous, and she did not object to doing some little good when it did not interfere with her own comfort. She rather liked presiding at certain benevolent associations, where little was to be given, and much to be said and discussed.

The grand charitable action of her life had, however, brought a tenfold reward with it, and that was when, some years before the time of which we speak, she had, on her husband's death, taken her orphan and destitute cousin, Fanny, to her house, and had found in her ever since the most cheerful and obliging companion that even

the most exacting widow-lady could be blessed with.

Such were the three ladies who were now preparing to start by train, to avail themselves of Mrs. Palmer's invitation to Holycross House. Happily Clara's fears were unfounded, for they were in good time; and at four o'clock reached the station, distant three miles from the place of their destination.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Morris, as she found Mr. Hammond's carriage waiting for them—"now, then, Fanny, pray make haste and help Jones to count the luggage; you know I have four boxes besides the smaller things, and Jones will be sure to leave something behind if you don't look after her. You have nothing, I suppose, besides your one box and carpet-bag?"

“Nothing,” said Fanny.

“Well, then, they can go with Clara’s maid and luggage in a fly ; I must have all my things with me, in case of accidents or mistakes ; so make haste, I am tired to death.”

At last the three ladies, with Mrs. Morris’s maid and luggage, were all packed satisfactorily into the old roomy coach of the Hammonds’.

“What a Noah’s ark this is !” said Mrs. Morris, as they drove off ; “such a lumbering old thing !—it must have belonged to Mr. Hammond’s mother. I am afraid, from all I hear, that he is very close. I hope I shall be comfortable in his house !—but Mrs. Palmer will take care of that, of course. Dear me ! I have not seen her since all her misfortunes. I

wonder if she is altered? I hope she won't talk to me about her husband's bankruptcy and death—I never know what to say when people talk to me of such dismal things; and then they expect so much sympathy, and such stuff—how tiresome it will be!

Here Fanny interrupted the flow of her cousin's eloquence, to remind her that, as it was now some years since Mr. Palmer's death, it might not be the uppermost subject of Mrs. Palmer's thoughts, or one that she was likely to enter upon on first seeing her friends."

"I am sure I hope not," returned Mrs. Morris; "at all events, Fanny, you can let her know, in a casual way, that any melancholy conversation is bad for me. You can tell her about Dr. Davis being con-

sulted at Ventnor, when I had that palpitation at my heart, the day that I got nervous about you and Clara staying out so long."

"Oh, Aunt!" exclaimed Clara, "it was not me—it was the lobster salad. You know Dr. Davis said it was nothing but indigestion."

"Well, indigestion is very bad for me, and excitement is sure to bring it on. You must see that my room is comfortable, Fanny, before I go into it; and tell Mrs. Palmer I like a rubber of whist in the evening, it saves me the trouble of talking; and I hope they won't expect me to walk about and look at things, it tires me to death! The worst of country visiting is, you are taken to see places and views, and I never could care about them."

“You are like the Frenchman, Aunt,” said Clara, “who said he abhorred ‘*les beautés de la nature*.’”

“I am sure I do, and he was a very sensible man; but if I don’t like my visit, I need not stay above a week. It is all on your account, Clara, that I am going—it is the beginning of troubles, I expect.”

“Thank you, Aunt, but I don’t think anything can be duller or more disagreeable than Wimpole Street in the month of September; I am very glad we are come into the country, I know I shall like it.”

“Ah, girls are always so selfish, they think of nothing but themselves and their own enjoyments and foolish fancies,” said Mrs. Morris, in a very soft, gentle tone, which took away the bitterness of the observation. In fact, this lady never changed

her tone or manner, whatever might be the subject of her discourse. She had a monotonous way of prattling on, and expressing her views of people and things in general, always in reference to the effect they might have upon her own individual comfort and amusement—beyond that, the world was welcome to go its own way. But this quiet prosing manner often imposed upon strangers, and deluded them into the belief that Mrs. Morris was a very amiable and benevolent woman.

“Here we are!” said Clara, as the heavy carriage drew up at the door of the ancient house. “What a charming grim-looking old place! What a pity it should be in the very heart of the town!”

“That is the best part about it to my mind,” replied her aunt.

"I daresay there are nice gardens and plenty of country to be seen behind," said Fanny Newton.

Michael Hammond was in the hall to receive his guests, and Mrs. Palmer quickly appeared also; and by the cheerfulness of her greeting soon removed from Mrs. Morris's mind all apprehension of a dismal reception on the part of her old acquaintance.

They were taken to the state drawing-room, which was only used on the occasion of visitors staying in the house. Mrs. Palmer had, by degrees, brought the large old-fashioned apartment to assume an air of comfort, and even luxury, that Michael, although tolerating on her account, would never have permitted on his own. However, he now considered it especially his

sister's room, and overlooked the innovations made in it.

Mrs. Morris was further reassured, on being shown into her own apartment, to find it contained everything she considered requisite for her comfort—that it was spacious, but not too large, and that it opened into a pleasant little sitting-room overlooking the garden; good fires in both cheered her eyes and heart—for Mrs. Morris, like all indolent people, was extremely chilly; in fact, everything appeared to be arranged with the most hospitable thought and care.

“And now,” said Mrs. Palmer, after showing her friend into her apartments, “I shall leave you to rest, dear Mrs. Morris. This little room is your snug-gery, whenever you do not feel disposed

to join the party downstairs; and, as we hope you mean to pass the autumn with us, I am sure you would be tired of seeing me all day, although I need not repeat how delighted I am, and always shall be, to see you."

This somewhat elaborate speech of Mrs. Palmer's was greatly to the taste of the lady she addressed, who felt at once that she, her individual self, was the chief object of attention and importance, and that her comfort and pleasure would be duly studied and promoted during her visit at Holycross House. With this persuasion on her mind, she quickly announced to Fanny and her maid that she thought she should make some stay, and all her things were to be unpacked and arranged accordingly.

Mrs. Morris's toilet was always a very elaborate one. She delighted in dress, it was one of the few subjects that excited any energy in her dormant faculties, and the principal pleasure she derived from any visit was the opportunity it afforded of displaying a constant variety of expensive and handsome dresses.

The heiress and her cousin occupied rooms adjoining each other, some trifling superiority of accommodation being awarded to the former, but, in every respect, less studied in the detail than those appropriated to Mrs. Morris.

The family party assembled to meet their guests at dinner. Michael was courteous and agreeable to his old acquaintance, Mrs. Morris; whilst Mrs. Palmer

was suavity itself that day, without the slightest alloy of the spitefulness that so frequently seasoned her discourse at home.

Clara Newton was a good-natured and rather unformed girl at that time, having seen very little either at home or elsewhere, and perfectly disposed to be amused and find pleasure in any change.

Fanny Newton happily found herself placed at dinner by the shy and silent Gabriel; she had therefore the satisfaction of devoting herself to the task of drawing him out, and encouraging him to talk, in which she succeeded so well, that both were mutually pleased with each other before the ladies left the room.

"Really, Miss Fanny," observed Mrs. Palmer, in a tone of gentle raillery, as

they entered the drawing-room, "you have made quite a conquest of my shy brother. I never saw Gabriel talk so much at dinner, he generally sits quite silent, unless he is spoken to ; it was very kind of you to make him so lively !"

"Is anything the matter with him now?" asked Mrs. Morris.

"Oh! he is always a poor weak ailing creature, though he has no particular cause for complaint; but he has dreadful headaches when he is tired, and, as you see, difficulty in speaking for any length of time."

"No, I did not see," said Mrs. Morris, settling herself comfortably in the depths of an arm-chair. "I heard he was all right again."

"Ah!" returned Mrs. Palmer, shaking

her head mysteriously, in a manner peculiar to herself, which caused a variety of pendent ornaments in her cap to vibrate with the motion—"Ah! he will always be a poor thing, as long as his life is spared!"

"Poor young man!" said Mrs. Morris, yawning; "I wonder he does not get a wife to nurse him."

Here the ornaments in Mrs. Palmer's cap vibrated almost hysterically.

"I hope not. I trust he will never be so wicked as to think of such a thing. We know, Mrs. Morris, what early widowhood is, and I should be sorry to see any young creature so surely doomed to it."

"Yes," replied her friend, wincing away from the mention of Mrs. Palmer's widow-

hood; "then that will be all the better for your son, if neither of his uncles marry, as it seems they won't?"

Mrs. Palmer inclined her head gently, as if partly in acquiescence, and partly to intimate the subject was one too delicate for her to discuss; but as Mrs. Morris was somewhat dull as to her discernment, she kept to the text of her friend's observation, and continued:

"Why, if neither of them marry, it *must* all come to Stephen Palmer at last. He will be as good a man as ever he expected to be!"

"Ah, my poor boy!" responded Mrs. Palmer. "He was indeed brought up with great expectations! We have indeed both met with sad reverses since we last met my dear friend!"

Mrs. Morris, becoming alarmed at this fulfilment of her fears, faintly replied :

“ Yes, everybody is born to suffer, in some way more or less. Pray, has Fanny told you, what a serious attack I had of heart complaint at Ventnor, the other day, when Dr. Davis was called in to see me ? ”

“ You don’t say so ! ” quickly replied Mrs. Palmer, with eager interest, and apparently forgetting her own mental sufferings in the bodily ones of her friend ; and then proceeded to ask sufficient questions to satisfy Mrs. Morris, and effectually to divert the current of her thoughts—or at least of her conversation.

After tea, the whist table was placed, and Mrs. Morris ordered Fanny Newton to make the fourth at the game. This arrange-

ment left Clara entirely to the mercies of the two younger gentlemen. With the good-natured intention of amusing her, Gabriel, after some hesitation, proposed teaching her chess. Clara laughed, and said she was sure the game was "too deep for her intellects."

"Try *écarté*, then," said Stephen, advancing with a pack of cards in his hands. "Let me show you the game, it is quite easy."

The young lady looked from one to the other of her proposed teachers, as they both stood beside her, waiting her decision. The choice was soon made.

"I fear," said she, with a pretty little glance and smile at Gabriel, "I am not equal to chess—cards are better suited to my capacity."

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Gabriel retreated quietly to his book,
and Stephen sat down to play his
game.

CHAPTER VIII.



TIME went on pleasantly enough in the old House at Holy-cross. Mrs. Morris found herself treated with the most gratifying attention by all there, especially by her old friend Mrs. Palmer, who was perfectly devoted to her, and seemed never tired of hearing Mrs. Morris talk about herself, admiring her dress, and sparing her all unnecessary trouble at exertion of mind and body.

Lady Linwood soon came with Lillian to

call on the new comers; and the two girls, taking a fancy to each other, were often together, whilst Lady Linwood found in the poor cousin a companion well suited to herself in tastes and pursuits. Thus it happened that the two families became more intimately associated than they had ever been before, and Lillian learnt to tolerate Mrs. Palmer for the sake of the friends she brought with her. Mrs. Morris was easily persuaded to stay on, and extend her visit into the month of October. She was comfortable, her niece gave her no trouble, and Fanny's office (owing to Mrs. Palmer's unremitting attentions) became almost a sinecure.

About this time Sir Arthur and Lady Stapleton returned from their wedding tour. Sir Arthur wished to be at home for

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pheasant-shooting, and Agnes was desirous of finding herself at the head of such a desirable establishment as Stapleton Park. She looked forward with pleasant satisfaction to seeing many of her former friends and relations as guests there, who, the preceding year, had grudgingly invited Lillian and herself in their hour of poverty and distress.

The morning after her arrival at home, Lady Stapleton drove herself over in her pretty pony phaeton to Linwood Lodge, anxious to see Lillian and her aunt. The day of her return had been uncertain, so the surprise was an addition to the pleasure of the meeting, and the sisters for the time appeared equally pleased in being once more together.

Inquiries were soon made after Sir

Arthur, which the young wife answered promptly.

“Ah! no doubt you expected to see us together on the occasion of my first call; but he would only have been in the way; and, of course, he had lots of things to do, and people to see, this morning—men always have. But, I can assure you, as you both wish to know, though you might not like to ask, that we are the happiest couple in the world, and I do exactly as I like; and Arthur is well pleased I should, and at present continues to think me perfection—and I mean to keep up the pleasing delusion as long as possible.”

“That is right, dear,” said Lady Linwood, smiling kindly; “only it need not be a delusion!”

"I fear it must, Aunt Mary, "and that I can never be one of your models of perfection, like Lillian."

"Are you alone now, Agnes?" asked Lillian, not wishing to hear of her perfections.

"Yes, quite, for one week. I was determined on that point, and that I would settle myself in my own house by myself. We saw the Stapletons, Lady Anne, and her daughters, in London as we came through. I saw they wanted me to bring Maria and Julia down with me; but I was blind and deaf. I mean to stand on my own ground, and to show Lady Anne that henceforth her son is under *my* command, and not *hers*, as he has been hitherto."

"Oh! Agnes, but it must be rather

hard at first for a mother with an only son, and such a darling as Sir Arthur has been !”

“The more kind of me, then, my dear, to let her see it at first, and to show that Lady Anne’s reign at Stapleton is over. As a *guest*, she will always be most welcome ; and so will her daughters, when it pleases me to ask them.”

“Well,” said Lillian, cheerfully, “I am glad, for a week, you can come often and see us, and I hope Sir Arthur will come also ; and now you will stay all to-day ?”

“Yes,” said Agnes, taking off her bonnet, “I am yours for the next few hours. Now, tell me all about everything.”

The two sisters sat down, happy in the

prospect of a long unrestrained chat, when Agnes, casting her eyes towards the window that looked into the garden, jumped up.

“Quick! quick! come here, Lillian, don’t let them see you; there are a lot of people coming—ring the bell, and say not at home.”

“Oh! I can’t. I forgot,” said Lillian, colouring; “it is the Newtons, they promised to come this morning. Aunt Mary asked them to luncheon; I forgot it all in the joy of seeing you, darling.”

“Goodness, what a bore! and who are the *Newtons*? Oh! some city heiress you wrote to me about. I am sure she ought to have plenty of money, if that is her.”

The latter part of this speech applied

to poor Fanny Newton, who, unconscious of strangers, had advanced first to knock at the window, according to custom, saying,

“We are early guests, Miss Grant, but Lady Linwood named one o’clock, that we might walk afterwards, and the two gentlemen are coming directly.”

“Yes, here we are, Lillian dear!” exclaimed Clara, following Fanny. “I saw Gabriel Hammond and Stephen Palmer leaving the bank opposite as we set off. I have begged for a holiday for them. Oh! here they come!”

Lady Stapleton at this speech drew further away from the window, being nearly concealed by the drapery, and muttering,

“Bankers’ clerks and City ladies! Oh,

Lillian! what a set! I am sure I am *de trop!*"

Poor Lillian received her friends very differently to her usual cordial welcome, feeling embarrassed and uncomfortable from hearing Agnes's remarks, and seeing with what *hauteur* she seated herself at a distance, and tied on her bonnet, at the same time ringing the bell.

In a constrained manner, therefore, she shook hands, and in a hesitating way named Lady Stapleton to her guests. Lady Linwood had unfortunately left the room, so there was no help at hand for her. Agnes made a distant bend, and sat rigidly aloof. Gabriel, with his stooping gait, entered next, and, with an active and alert step, Stephen Palmer followed.

Lillian's colour deepened, and with a faltering voice she said,

"We have just had such an unexpected pleasure in seeing my sister. I did not know she had returned."

All Lillian's guests rose up; for Gabriel came up to her, and said,

"Forgive our intrusion. We congratulate you; and now we will leave you," with a courteous and distant bow to Lady Stapleton.

Gabriel with his friends had left the room, before she was hardly aware of the deliverance.

Lillian stood rooted to the place where she had seen them come and go; she hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. She only said,

"I hope they will not think us very rude."

"I am glad, at all events," replied her sister, "that Mr. Hammond (I suppose it was he) had the sense to see they were all *de trop*. But, my poor dear Lillian, this will never do for you. I have got a plan in my head for your advantage; but I will not tell you at present. Aunt Mary is a most excellent and charming person, but she does not live in the set that I should like my sister to do. And I tell you fairly, Lillian, I will not call on any of your Newtons, or Palmers, or those sort of people; and you must come and stay with me when Aunt Mary likes to have them about her!"

"Oh, Agnes! I am sure Aunt Mary's friends are good enough for me; and I am sorry we sent them away now."

"We did not send them; they could

not do otherwise than go. If they had not departed promptly, I should; for I came to see you, and not to be mixed up with all that set!"

"Well, at all events, you must have thought Clara Newton very pretty; and she is rich enough to marry as she pleases, so you may see her a great lady some day, Agnes."

"When I do, Lillian, I shall be happy to make her acquaintance. At present, and with the people about her, I confess I do not consider it an eligible one. She may have beauty, but she has no style, and that is everything—there! Here is Aunt Mary; and now let us go to luncheon, and forget the bank, and all the partners past and present."

In the meantime, the discarded party

walked quietly back to the old house in the Market Place, Clara laughing all the way, and saying, "How quickly you turned us all back, Mr. Gabriel! I did not know we had received our *congé*. Did not Lillian wish us to stay?"

"I am sure she did, but her sister did not; she was just arrived, and wished to be alone with Lillian—Miss Grant," said Gabriel, in explanation.

"That was very natural," replied Fanny. "I would not have been in her way for the world. You were quite right, Mr. Gabriel, to turn us all round."

"It was so funny," laughed Clara again, "to march in at the window and out at the door, all in the space of a minute. How that Lady Stapleton must have been amused!"

“Amused!” echoed Stephen scornfully. “It was all her doing; if she had possessed the least spark of ladylike feeling, she would have prevented our being turned out of her aunt’s house, where we went by her invitation. I tell you that woman is the most scornful, arrogant upstart that ever came into the world. She is so set up by her marriage, that she forgets what a poor penniless creature she was when Sir Arthur took her. After all, the Stapleton property is not such a great catch as she thinks—there are heavy mortgages on it, and Lady Anne’s jointure.”

“Hush! hush! Stephen,” interrupted Gabriel, who was sufficiently a man of business to feel how great an indiscretion his nephew was committing in his wrath, in making revelations that it was not proper for him to make.

"Ay," replied he, "I may not reveal the secrets of the prison-house, I suppose; but I am much mistaken," he continued, with sudden energy, "if in the course of a few years we do not all hear more than that of the Stapleton estate. My lady will spend right and left, and soon get the upper hand of that poor little man, who has been under his mamma's orders till she took him into her own hands."

"Well, we need not predict evil," said Gabriel, as they stood on the steps, and he opened the door for his friends, and, to the surprise of the home party, proceeded to join them at luncheon. Mrs. Palmer's indignation may be conceived; Mrs. Morris cared for none of these things, as she had not been of the party. She was rather amused than otherwise at their return, and

sat watching the speakers, as if she had been present at a play.

Michael laughed a short scornful laugh, as Stephen recapitulated his grievances. "Never mind, boy, if Lady Stapleton turns her back on the bankers now, some day they may return the compliment, and I guess then which will be the worse off."

Clara looked at Stephen's angry countenance, and as he helped her at luncheon, said, in a low voice, "You quite frighten me; I did not think you could have been in such a passion."

"I should be worth nothing," he returned, in the same tone, "if I could stand by and see *you*—you so superior in every way—turned out, yes, turned out of the house that you condescended to enter."

"Oh, don't think about me, Mr. Palmer,

it is such nonsense; and it was all your uncle Gabriel's doing—he thought we had better leave the two sisters together, that was all.”

Stephen gazed with one long admiring look at the bright and beautiful face.

“The more you excuse, the more inexcusable I think them both; and that Miss Lillian too—your own dear friend—never to make one attempt to stop you, it was hateful!”

“No, it was better, poor dear, if she saw her fine grand sister did not want us. What could she do? Poor dear little Lillian, I will go and see her to-morrow.”

“No, you shall not,” exclaimed Stephen, in such a determined voice that it caught Michael's ear, and he said,

“Come, come, you need not crow quite

so loud; but" (to Clara) "in the main thing I am inclined to agree with my nephew—that is, you had better not call again at the Lodge till Miss Grant has been to see you. I would not put myself in the way of a repetition of this morning's farce, and I think Mrs. Morris will agree with me."

"Perfectly and entirely," responded the lady thus appealed to, in a most placid tone of voice; "I am sure I should not go anywhere where people were not civil to me, and I should feel very angry at being asked out to luncheon, and then getting none, and having to come home for it; indeed, I think you may consider yourselves very lucky in finding it still on the table, so I beg, Clara, you will do as Mr. Hammond thinks best."

Clara received her sentence in silence, and, after a few minutes, got up, calling her cousin to walk out with her; but when Fanny had reached the door, she was counter-ordered by Mrs. Morris, who called out,

“No, Fanny, I want you upstairs; I have got all wrong with my anti-macassar, and I want you to pull out some of the stitches and put it to rights—I can’t go on till you do, so Clara may walk in the garden till you are at liberty to join her there.”

The three ladies then adjourned to the morning room, where Gabriel followed, to look for a book he had been reading the preceding day. Mrs. Palmer, who had seated herself at her work, glanced up several times at her brother. Her brow

was still ruffled, and an angry spot burnt on either cheek, though, according to her custom, she kept her indignation within the bounds of small spiteful speeches.

"I suppose *you* will be going over to the Lodge again this afternoon, Gabriel?"

"I have no present intention of doing so."

"Was it Lady Linwood or Miss Grant that sent you back this morning?"

"Neither; I sent myself home."

"Because you saw you were not wanted!"

Gabriel was silent.

"Really, Gabriel, I must say you act very unsuitably to your position in life."

"I am very sorry you think so, Sybil; but I do not know what you mean."

“Why, in putting up with all the airs of Lady Linwood and her nieces. I do believe, if she gave you a slap on the cheek, you would think it right to present the other to her.”

Gabriel laughed.

“That is a test of Christian meekness I do not think Lady Linwood is likely to subject me to; if she did, perhaps I might.”

“Really!” exclaimed Mrs. Palmer, with a bitter little laugh; “what astonishing amiability!”

“Well,” observed Fanny, with a good-natured smile, “at all events, he would have good authority for so doing—no one could blame him.”

“Yes, it is in the Bible,” observed Mrs. Morris, with a very self-satisfied

air, considering herself at the same time a most excellent and religious woman.

“Ah! my dear Mrs. Morris, so it may be,” said Mrs. Palmer; “but with Gabriel it is all perversion and perversity.”

“Indeed, Sybil, I am sorry you think so,” said Gabriel, as he rose and left the room to avoid further discussion.

Clara, in the meantime, wandered about the garden. It was spacious, and laid out in old-fashioned grass walks and terraces, which terminated in a wide lawn sloping down to the river, on which the town of Holycross was situated.

The only paths were through the wide and thick plantations, which stretched some way on either side of the house, enclosing the grounds, and, after a consi-

derable sweep, meeting on either side of the lawn by the water's edge. The place was entirely secluded from the adjacent houses, and fields sloped up from the opposite side of the river, so nothing but a wide country view presented itself on that side of the house. In the distance the Lodge was dimly visible through the trees that encircled it, and a walk across the fields led to its grounds and gardens. It was a nearer and pleasanter way than that through the town, and was the one Gabriel greatly preferred.

Clara, having walked through one of the plantations, stood musing at the water's edge, expecting her cousin to join her. The sound of steps amongst the fallen leaves caused her to look round. It was not Fanny, however, but Stephen

Palmer whom she saw approaching. Clara felt a little embarrassed, she hardly knew why, as the young man joined her and stood by her side, saying,

“I thought I should find you here.”

“Yes,” said Clara, with a little laugh, “you knew my wings were clipped—I could not fly far. If it had not been for you, I might have been on that path, and up at the Lodge before now. I can’t think what makes you all so touchy and easily offended; I am sure Gabriel is the most sensible.”

“He is very fortunate that you should think so; he is happy, also, in the insensibility that prevents his resenting any affront offered by his friends to you—for you must feel it was one. Yes, Clara—Miss Newton, I beg your

pardon!—do you suppose for one moment that *my self-love* was hurt at Lady Stapleton and her sister's rudeness? You little know me if you do. No, it was the insult to you—you who so honoured them by going at all. You are not aware, or you choose to forget, your own claims to consideration.”

“Oh! please don't let us say any more about it; I am quite sick of the subject already,” said Clara, with a flushed cheek.

“What subject?” persisted Stephen quietly—“that of your own charming unconsciousness, of your own merits. Well, well, I will not discuss that; you will soon be made but too fully aware of the power you possess, in various ways, over all who approach you.”

“Pray, Mr. Palmer, talk a little sense if you choose to come here and talk to me.”

“Forgive me if I trespass in thus intruding upon your solitude. I feel indeed how presumptuous it is in me, the ruined man, to talk to the beautiful, the happy heiress. I forget none of your claims, Miss Newton, whatever you may do yourself; nor do I forget the wide gulf that separates us.”

“Oh, indeed! How can you talk so. You have been reading some nonsense; you are a very comfortable ruined man, I am sure; living here in this charming old place, and doing everything you like.”

“You forget the bank!” interrupted Stephen, with a half smile.

“Indeed, no; I ought not. I have the

greatest respect for it. Papa made all his money there, and I am and shall be always greatly indebted to it. So, I dare say, you will be, some day or other!"

"I never allow myself to look forward to the time of my uncle's death."

"No, indeed," returned Clara, with horror. "You would be very wicked to do so. But I mean you are in the bank, and can make as much money as you please; and, in the meantime, you live here with the best, kindest people in the world. I like everything, and your two uncles' nice old names. I tell Fanny they are the two archangels!"

"Uncle Michael is not very much like an angel in his appearance, I think," replied Stephen, smiling again. "Gabriel is certainly fragile-looking enough for one. I

am sure they ought both to be highly flattered and indebted to you for your exalted opinion. I am afraid *I* have not the happiness and good fortune to stand as high in your favourable opinion as my uncles?"

"I am not in the habit of telling people my opinion of them, if it is very good or very bad," replied Clara, evasively.

"I hope, at all events, it is not the latter?" asked Stephen.

"Come!" exclaimed Clara, rather impatiently, "I am tired of standing here; it is cold. I will go back to the house and see if Fanny has finished picking out my aunt's work."

Stephen made no attempt to detain or to follow her. He looked after her

whilst she remained in sight, and then communed thus with his own heart:

“Is she in jest or in earnest? Can she be as indifferent as she seems? I can't see my way at all with her at present. Well, these are early days—faint heart never won fair lady yet! She certainly laughed at my heroics; that won't do. She can't be in love with Gabriel; but girls are so perverse, as her aunt says. I doubt her having much heart or feeling. She may resemble Mrs. Morris in that respect. I wonder how my mother gets on with that lady?”

CHAPTER IX.



T was then about the time of the annual ball, which always took place in October at Holycross. Mrs. Morris and her niece remained to be present at it, for the former had declared her intention of returning to London before November. That was the month when most of her resident friends came back to town, and then their quiet season of winter visiting and entertainments commenced.

Mrs. Morris declared the country was

bad for her health in the month of November, with all the fallen leaves and damp; and she considered it necessary to betake herself then to Wimpole Street. She had gone through a round of hospitalities amongst old friends and new acquaintances, in and about Holycross, during her visit to Mrs. Palmer. She had displayed all the large stock of dresses with which she had provided herself on going there. And now an extensive order had been sent to her London milliner, to prepare her own and her niece's ball costume for the forthcoming occasion. It may be observed *en passant*, that Mrs. Morris always considered her own toilet of infinitely more importance than her niece's; for, said she,

“ Girls always look alike in a ball-

room; they have something white and light, with flowers, and there's an end of it!"

Mrs. Palmer, for the first time since her widowhood, prepared also once more to grace the Holycross Assembly Rooms. She always dressed well and suitably, though with far more regard to expense than her friend Mrs. Morris.

Poor Fanny's wardrobe on this occasion was good-naturedly supplied by Clara, who had, with kind thought, ordered a pretty new dress for her, which was gratefully accepted, with even more pleasure, in the kindness shown by the donor, than in the acquisition of what she really required.

This ball took place about ten days after the visit to the Lodge, and nothing

had been seen of its inhabitants in the meantime. Gabriel had called the following day, but was told the ladies were from home. The fact was, Agnes had persuaded her aunt and sister to pass her quiet week with her at Stapleton, and they only returned the day before the ball; so had no opportunity of meeting before. But both Lillian and Lady Linwood looked forward to meeting their Holycross House friends, as one of the pleasantest expectations of the coming evening.

Michael Hammond had always made it a point of conscience to attend this annual assembly of his native town. And the presence of the wealthy and respected banker was as surely reckoned on as the arrival of the ball day itself.

Gabriel had also been his brother's

frequent companion on these occasions of late years; but it is not on record that either of the Mr. Hammonds had ever been seen to dance. It was, however, a most unusual circumstance to see so large a party from Holycross House, and Michael entered the ball-room, on the appointed evening, with the pleasing conviction of having greatly added to the *éclat* of the ball by the number of the friends he brought with him that evening.

Clara Newton was one of the prettiest girls in the room. Her girlish grace and beauty were set off by a perfectly faultless though simple toilet. Even Lady Stapleton could find no reason to complain of want of style. Mrs. Morris made a handsome and well-dressed chaperon to the youthful heiress; whilst poor

Fanny, by dint of the exertions of Clara's little French maid, was made to look quite presentable and personable in her pretty new dress and wreath.

Mrs. Palmer, too, leaning on the arm of her handsome son, was a very interesting object to many of her old friends, who recollected her last in that room surrounded with all the prestige that wealth could bestow, when that son, then a boy, was the heir to so a large a fortune. Some whispered remarks to this effect about the Palmers reached the ear of Clara Newton, as she stood rather behind her party, on entering the ball-room, having dropped her guardian's arm, owing to the pressure of the crowd, whilst waiting for the dance to be concluded before they

could move on. These casual observations aroused a new train of thought and feeling in Clara's mind; and she looked at Stephen Palmer with an interest she had never entertained for him before. She recollected, almost with shame, the flippancy with which she had laughed at the idea of his being a ruined man, and remembered how he had been brought up with expectations even greater than her own; and she feared she might have hurt his feelings in having treated them as lightly as she had done.

Stephen Palmer was certainly very good-looking and gentlemanlike, and in the Holy-cross ball-room he appeared to particular advantage. His manners were quiet, and he could be pleasing when he chose. Whilst he stood speaking to Lady Linwood, who

had hastened to meet her friends, Clara heard Lady Stapleton (who had quite forgotten him) ask Lillian who that gentleman-like man was. She was much amused, and listened for the reply.

“Only one of your very objectionable clerks, my dear Agnes.”

“I don’t know any clerks. Do you mean he is one of your banking firm?”


“Even so,” said Lillian, laughing; and Lady Stapleton turned away with an air of vexation. She had brought a large party with her, who distinguished themselves chiefly by keeping together, and only dancing with a few other people of equal distinction with themselves.

The neighbourhood of Holycross did not boast of many great places in its immediate vicinity, although it possessed a good many

of considerable respectability. Towards the inhabitants of these, Lady Stapleton conducted herself with lofty condescension, and was extremely annoyed when some of those she considered the best men of her own party begged for an introduction to the pretty heiress. Nor could she prevail upon them to desist from their intentions by representing her horror of the tribes in which the beauty dwelt.

“More reason, then,” drawled out one of her titled friends, “that she should be rescued from their toils—she is amazingly pretty !”

Lady Stapleton put up her glass. “I really can’t see it!”—and called Lillian to perform the part of introduction, which she could not refuse altogether. Lady Linwood, with her perfect unconsciousness



of offence, soon made her peace with her friends; and being ignorant of the reception they had met with from Lady Stapleton, reproached Gabriel and the others for running away when she expected them to luncheon. Lillian looked a little conscious, but, turning to Gabriel, said in her easy and natural manner,

“I know you thought we wished to be alone, and Agnes was almost a stranger to all your party, so you did, as usual, what you thought kindest to everybody. We went away the next day, or I should have called to explain. I fear I was very stupid to let you run away, and you were gone before I knew that you were going.”

“Pray—pray do not take the trouble to think one moment more about it,” said

Gabriel, who had found an unoccupied corner close by Lady Linwood's chair, whilst Lillian stood near her in the pause between the dances.

"I am glad to see you here this evening, Gabriel," said Lady Linwood; "you have brought quite a large party, and done your duty to the ball very handsomely."

"Yes," said Lillian, "the only duty remaining for you to perform now, is to dance yourself."

"Do you really wish to see me so ridiculous, Miss Grant? Would you dance with me yourself?"

"To be sure I would," said Lillian, quickly, with a look of glad surprise and inquiry at Gabriel.

"Ah! I only wished to test the extent of your goodness and friendship;

but I should be sorry to tax it so far."

"Because you have never stood up before, I suppose you feel it would be a strange proceeding; but I could get you through a quadrille, I daresay, if you like to try."

Gabriel said nothing, but fixed his eyes on Lillian's sweet, open countenance with an expression of almost passionate admiration.

"Now you are going to dance again, and my happy time is over."

"I shall be back soon," said Lillian, smiling. "You can keep my place, if you like it."

And Gabriel did like it, and he had a long and interesting talk with Lady Linwood before Lillian returned.

"I am tired now," she said. "I mean to rest the next dance."

"Then this is to be my dance?" asked he.

Lillian nodded and smiled, and Gabriel took his happy place beside her; at a little distance were Mrs. Palmer and her friend, also well occupied and amused.

"Can you tell me who Clara is dancing with?" asked Mrs. Morris, as she sat in state in the middle of one of the principal sofas, filling up a large expanse, and looking on complacently.

"I asked the question just now, for he is a stranger here," answered Mrs. Palmer. "It is Lord George Tudor; he came with the Stapleton party, and my wonder is they let him dance out of their own set."

"Lady Stapleton couldn't help it, I daresay," replied Mrs. Morris. "Oh! dear, how I dread those young lords; they are always on the look-out for heiresses. I wish, with all my heart, Clara hadn't a penny."

"Oh! depend upon it, she won't trouble you long. Some of these fine gentlemen will only be too happy to release you of the charge, and take her quite away from us all. It would be much better, I am sure, if you could find her a good husband," suggested the wily Mrs. Palmer, "such as you and I had—not too grand to acknowledge her relations—there are plenty such to be had, and with money, too."


"Ah! Mrs. Palmer," replied her friend, "now, if your son had but the money he

ought to have had, what a match that would have been!—and there would have been an end of all the trouble and bother and worry I am likely to have with Clara.”

Mrs. Palmer’s heart gave a quick bound, but she contented herself with saying, quietly,

“My son has certainly been very unhappy in suffering from his poor father’s misfortunes. I have, however, reason to hope that his prospects may be good in other respects; and no one can deny,” she added, with a mother’s pride, “but that his looks and appearance are in his favour.”

“I see nothing amiss with his looks or himself either,” said Mrs. Morris patronizingly; “but don’t you see,” lowering her



voice, "I have my suspicions, and wouldn't give much for his chance of standing in his uncle's shoes. Gabriel is not so much older than him, and he will marry some day. Gabriel's in love!"

This astounding communication was rather an exertion to the lady who made it; and she leant back, and fanned herself, keeping her eyes fixed rather vacantly on her friend's face. Mrs. Palmer first glanced to the place where Gabriel sat, leaning over the back of Lillian's chair; she was looking down and playing with her fan, and he was talking earnestly. It was certainly very lover-like talk.

"Impossible!" gasped Mrs. Palmer; "she can't like a poor thing like him!"

"But she *does*, depend upon it," returned her friend.

“Indeed, I think you are mistaken,” said Mrs. Palmer more calmly. “You do not know Gabriel’s ways as well as I do; he is so shy and awkward in general, that when he finds by chance anyone he can talk to, and who will listen to him, he will go on for ever about some flowers, or birds, or butterflies, or some such rubbish!”

“Well, some girls like that; and they are so perverse, they are sure to take a fancy to the last person you would think of. And that Miss Grant, I daresay she is not much in the way of seeing many nice young men in Holycross.”

“She will be in the way of seeing plenty, I expect,” replied Mrs. Palmer, “if that is her taste, at her sister’s henceforth.”

“Ah, indeed! that’s likely enough. But

I say, talking of fine gentlemen, can you tell me who that is just come into the room—there now, just passing in front of us?”

This query applied to a young man who had lately entered the ball-room; he was very handsome, and rather *distingué* in appearance, but there was a dissatisfied, almost reckless expression of countenance, which somewhat qualified the favourable impression otherwise produced by his good looks. He was a stranger, it seemed, for Mrs. Palmer had never seen him before, and he appeared to be looking round for some friend or friends he wished to join.

“I can’t think who he can be,” said Mrs. Palmer; “and it is very late to come to the ball.”

“He is in time for the supper,” observed Mrs. Morris, who evidently thought that the most interesting event of the evening.

The young man, after taking a rapid survey of the room, followed with his eyes the same direction as that to which the two ladies’ observations had been recently directed. He made his way directly towards the place where Lady Linwood and Lillian, attended by Gabriel, were sitting. He advanced towards them from behind—they had neither seen his entrance nor noticed his approach; he soon came close to them; he was observed to smile as he laid his hand on Lillian’s arm, and caused her to start and turn round; whilst Gabriel drew back, a bewildered spectator of the meeting and familiar greeting that followed.

“Well, that’s pretty plain for a ball-room,” said Mrs. Morris, who was curiously eyeing the party in question, and saw Lillian, with an eager look of delight, jump up to welcome the new comer, putting both her hands into his extended ones, and look even as if she would have liked to have given and received a warmer greeting!


“Humph!” responded Mrs. Palmer, with a species of grimace, betokening her ideas of outraged propriety. “Well, that must content Gabriel, at all events, as to the young lady’s sentiments, if he was ever so foolish as you think him.”

The friends continued their observations, and soon saw Lady Linwood give a kind though less demonstrative welcome to the stranger; and soon Gabriel was called upon to be introduced, and to their surprise

seemed to undergo the ceremony with quiet ease and self-possession, and, after a few sentences exchanged, strolled away, leaving the new-comer to enjoy the undisturbed society of his old friends.

As he passed near where the two ladies sat in council on his proceedings, his sister called him softly by name; and Gabriel, all unconscious of the scrutiny to which he had been subjected, obeyed the summons. Mrs. Palmer did not, however, at once broach the subject near her heart. She only remarked, "I think they will soon be going in to supper, and perhaps you will get us through the crowd, if you are not otherwise engaged?"

"I should have been very glad," returned her brother, "but I am to take Lady Linwood in. I will tell Michael to go to you



when he has finished his rubber in the next room."

"You are very obliging indeed," replied Mrs. Palmer, bridling; "Lady Linwood, of course, has the first claim upon you! I am quite aware how little I can reckon upon my brother's attention, when she is in question."

"Never mind," interposed Mrs. Morris, placidly, "brothers never attend to their sisters at balls, even in their young days—I am sure mine never did; but now I want to know, Mr. Gabriel, who that fine young gentleman is, just come in, and so sweet upon your friend, Miss Grant—there! they are going to stand up to dance together?"

The lady's curiosity was not, however, destined to be gratified at that moment, as a friend of Gabriel's (one of the Forsters)

coming up suddenly, and placing his arm in his, drew him away to make some interesting communication, leaving them still in a state of suspense. At the conclusion of the dance, the welcome move to supper was made, and Mr. Hammond, with old-fashioned punctuality, made his appearance in time to conduct his friend and guest through the crowded apartment; whilst, to Mrs. Palmer's great satisfaction and relief, Mr. Forster, the senior partner, presented himself at the same time to offer his services.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Morris, shaking out her ample skirts as she rose, "let us keep close, and get the best places near the fire, and as far away from the draught of the door, and on the right side to be helped."

Michael heard these directions, then asked, quickly, "Where is Clara?"

"Oh, somewhere safe, I suppose. Girls never care where they sit at supper, so don't let us lose a good place, waiting and dawdling about, to look for her."

A satisfactory sight, however, just then appeared; which was Stephen Palmer, with Clara Newton on his arm, hastily approaching her easy chaperon, and saying, "I begged Miss Newton to keep this dance for me, that we might go in with you."

"Well, that was very thoughtful of you," replied the aunt, "and I daresay we shall be more comfortable together; so now let us go."

Just then Gabriel passed with Lady Linwood; and Lillian, looking bright and happy,

followed, earnestly talking to her new friend and partner.

As soon as the party gained the places so eagerly desired by Mrs. Morris, and that lady had been helped and attended to in every possible way, the question was again mooted respecting the stranger.

“Oh,” said Clara, “haven’t you heard? Such happiness for Lillian! Her brother came quite unexpectedly. She thought he was in Ireland, and never dreamed of seeing him here. She told me in the last dance, for they stood up together to talk, that she might not have to dance with any one else, and she introduced him to me, and he has asked me for the first waltz after supper.”

“Her brother!” exclaimed Mrs. Palmer.

“I did not know she had one,” ob-

served Mrs. Morris, nonchalantly, helping herself largely to an old-fashioned dish of trifle.

"Yes, I have heard of him," observed Mrs. Palmer, with an ominous shake of all the pendent cap adornments.

"What is he like?" asked Stephen; "he is a fine-looking fellow—I forget what his regiment is."

"I have been told," answered Mrs. Palmer, "that he is extremely wild, very extravagant, and a great trouble and tax upon all his family."

"Who do you mean by his family?" asked Michael.

"I was told," replied his sister, "that his uncle, Lord Carlton (his mother's brother), had refused to have anything to do with him, and that Lady Linwood was

not particularly desirous of seeing him at the Lodge."

"I believe," observed Mr. Forster, "that Mrs. Palmer's informant is partly correct; for my son is in Mr. Grant's regiment, and says he spends more money than any of the young men of his own standing; and we all know his father, Colonel Grant, was much involved at the time of his death, so he can have little or nothing; but I believe, from what he tells me, Mr. Grant is indebted to Lord Carlton for some small allowance, though he can't expect more, as he has a family himself."

"I always heard he was under a cloud," observed Mrs. Palmer.

"Not so bad as that," said Mr. Forster, "or he would hardly keep in a good regi-

ment; but I should think there must be a crash sooner or later."

"Perhaps he may manage to pick up a fortune or an heiress in the meantime," observed Stephen innocently.

"That remark is intended for my benefit," said Clara, laughing, in a low voice.

"I would certainly put you on your guard if I dared, but I am quite aware how you would receive any advice from me."

"What advice do you wish to give me?" asked Clara.

"Some that you will have much need to follow in the course of your experience, only to test the true from the false metal."

"How very professional you are!" said Clara, laughing; "that is what comes of counting out gold and silver all day; you can think of nothing else."

Stephen looked annoyed, but only replied,

“You may laugh at me if you will, but I care not if you will allow my words to have the slightest weight with you.”

“Well! I will tell you to-morrow what I think of this dangerous character you have all been describing—he may not be so black as he is painted,” returned Clara carelessly.

The ball was over, at least for the Holy-cross party, for Mrs. Morris only permitted her niece the one dance that followed after supper, and was promised to Lillian’s brother. It was observed by some that Lady Stapleton did not give a very cordial welcome to this unexpected arrival; but Lady Linwood was heard to say, “If Agnes cannot receive you at present, Alexander, Lillian,

and I shall claim you at the Lodge till she
can ; so get your things and come home
with us."

CHAPTER X.



THE morning after the ball Lillian was alone in the drawing-room at the Lodge; her brother had ridden over early in the morning to Stapleton Park. Lady Linwood went out by herself after luncheon, Lillian preferring to wait her brother's return.

There was perplexity and uneasiness depicted in the expression of her sweet countenance; she seemed unable to settle herself to any of her usual employments, and appeared to be revolving some trouble-

some question in her mind, whilst her actions partook of the restlessness of her thoughts. She walked up and down the pretty room, now and then stopping to alter the position of a piece of china, or gaze so often at the clock upon a marble slab, that she seemed to be counting moments till they grew into minutes; but she neither observed what she handled nor noted what she saw—her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. At last the door opened, and Lillian went quickly towards it as her brother entered.

“Well, Alec, dear, what result? Good news, I hope?”

“No, Lillian, never hope anything more for or from me. I am utterly and entirely done for. I must leave the Army and sell my commission.”

“Dearest Alec, don’t talk so! surely Agnes will try and help you.”

“No, she won’t; she heard me as calmly as if I had been an utter stranger to her, and repeated over and over again—what I knew as well as she did—that it was all my own fault—that I had no one but myself to thank for my misfortunes, and flatly refused to ask her husband to advance a shilling on my behalf, though I explained I would try and pay her interest for the money, if she would promise me what I require, and, without which, all my prospects in life would be entirely blighted.”

“What did she say to that?” asked poor Lillian, the tears trembling in her pitying eyes.

“Don’t cry, my pet?” said her brother,

kissing the tears away. "I am not worth it. Agnes said, with cold composure, that no one could regret my proceedings more than herself, and the inevitable consequences which she had long foreseen, as well as other members of our mother's family, who had refused to do anything more for me. She proceeded to say that, once and for ever, she must decline giving me any assistance, or importuning her husband on my behalf—as if I wished her to do! In fact, Lillian, my darling, she has no more heart than a stone, and is much more like a marble statue than a woman. Oh! if you had been in her position, Lilly, would not you have helped me in this difficulty and distress. I came over in the full hope that something might

be done or arranged, with her assistance; and you can do nothing, or my good Aunt Linwood?"

"How much do you want, Alec? —what is the very least?" said poor Lillian, with sudden hope.

"Nothing under a thousand pounds can save me. I shall never be able to show my face again if I can't get it. It was the most unlucky turn of ill luck in that racing transaction of which I told you, and no fault of mine; and then my creditors, since my father's death two years ago, have been getting clamorous. I might stave them off a little longer, but debts of honour must be paid. The question is, how?"

"Dearest Alec, what can be done? Have you applied to our uncle Carlton?"

said the poor girl, to whom her worthless, reckless brother was the dearest object in life.

“No, I knew that was useless; the paltry eighty pounds a year he doles out to me is the very utmost I can expect from him; and even that is at his will and pleasure to continue or discontinue. It being so uncertain, I can raise no money on that, though I might pay some small interest, if I could get accommodation—but no one will give it me. Well, this will possibly be my last visit to you, Lilly, so let us enjoy it; and if nothing can be done, it is a shame to torment you in this way. Hark! what’s that? The door bell?—I can’t face morning visitors—I must cut and run.”

Suiting the action to the word, Alexander

Grant quickly opened the door leading into the garden and disappeared, leaving his sister, who was quite as little fitted as himself at that moment for the task of entertaining guests.

Lillian felt for an instant tempted to follow her brother's retreating steps, but, checking her inclination, she sat down to await the coming visitor.

The servant opened the door, announced "Mr. Gabriel Hammond," and withdrew.

"I thought I should find your brother," said he; "I was told he was at home, and my visit is to him."

"So he was this moment; he is only just gone out."

Lillian stopped a moment, and hesitated. She hardly knew what to say, as Gabriel's

eyes were bent anxiously on her troubled countenance.


“I see,” said he, “I am again unlucky—*de trop*, as they say. You were talking with your brother so lately arrived, and I am interrupting all your comfort. Forgive me—I will go.”

“No, don’t, please,” pleaded Lillian, for the thought rushed into her mind of confiding this family trouble to one she knew to be so good and true, and so capable of giving her and her young brother the best and kindest advice. By degrees the whole cause of her sorrow and distress dropped from her lips. With tender care to avoid casting the blame he so richly deserved upon that brother, she confided to Gabriel that he had come to her in his ruin and impending disgrace—that she *could* not,

and her sister Agnes *would* not, help him.

Gabriel heard her to the end, and then an expression of wild happiness thrilled through his heart, and flitted across his quiet pale face. The feeling was—"I can relieve her—she comes to me in her trouble!" But no selfish hope of profiting himself from the assistance he might give ever entered his disinterested sensitive mind. In fact, it served to place Lillian at a still greater distance than ever from him; but he would ever be her friend—true, firm, and disinterested. What more could he ask of Heaven or her?

"Lillian Grant," said he, in the intensity and concentration of his feelings, forgetful of his usual formality of address, "I thank you with all my heart—you have treated



me as your friend, and it will be my earnest endeavour to deserve the title. I can easily give your brother the assistance he requires. You know I am a man of business, so do not thank me—it is all in my way; he can pay me what interest he finds convenient—I require no security. The money you mention shall be forthcoming this afternoon. I will see you again—till then, farewell!”

And, without waiting for another word or parting look, Gabriel was gone, and Lillian stood rooted to the floor where he had left her; he had not even taken her hand on leaving her; but it seemed like a dream, she could hardly realise it. Her brother was saved in reputation, in social position—rescued from his state of reckless despair, and all in one little hour;

it was less than that since he had left the room, and fled from his benefactor. The door opened softly from the garden; Alexander Grant's handsome head appeared through the opening.

"Gone! am I safe to return?"

He was quite startled as the usually quiet, gentle Lillian threw herself into his arms the instant he stepped into the room.

"Yes, yes! darling, you are safe, quite safe. I have got the money for you—it is all right!"

For a moment Alexander looked as if he doubted his sister's sanity; then he asked if it was Aunt Mary who had entered the room and proved such an angel to him, though he was well aware it was impossible for her to help him to that

extent, without serious inconvenience to herself.

Lillian, then, with some hesitation and many pretty blushes, explained it was a very dear and old friend of her aunt's, and that he was a banker, and therefore used to lend. She understood, in fact, but little of the real weight of the benefit bestowed—her brother was more enlightened and more cautious.

“I have heard of the Hammonds, bankers,” said he; “but to lend a thousand pounds on no security, and any interest, payable at any time, is quite inexplicable; unless”—he looked suspiciously at the soft colour on Lillian's cheek—“is your banker friend a young man, Lilly?”

“I hardly know—I never thought of

him as a young man; but he is not old—at all events, he is rather young than old.”


“Then, Lilly, he loves you, so I can let him oblige me with a clear conscience. The balance is struck between us; but I shall like and honour him evermore, and wish him success.”

“Oh! Alexander, dear, how can you talk so? There he comes! he must see you now. It is my turn to run away.”

She did so. Gabriel was again announced; his interview with Mr. Grant was not very long.

When the brother and sister next met he kissed her, saying,

“Lilly, you have saved me—God bless you!”



The next day he took leave of her
and of the town of Holycross.

CHAPTER XI.



HOLYCROSS HOUSE was in a bustle the morning after the ball. Mrs. Morris and the Misses Newtons were preparing to leave it. Their visit had now extended to six weeks, and Michael Hammond no longer sought to prevent their departure. His hospitality was perfectly sincere whilst it was exercised ; but, like all his other virtues, was of a measured and modified character. Thus, when his friends had stayed with him a fitting

time, he readily acquiesced in the necessity of their departure and return to their own home.

Michael had wished to become well acquainted with his young ward, as well as those who were immediately about her. He had now seen, and was satisfied; he judged pretty accurately, and estimated the characters he had been associated with for the last six weeks much according to their intrinsic worth. He liked the pretty young heiress, and found she ran no risk of being spoilt from home flattery, as is so often the case with girls of her pretensions; nor did she seem at present in any imminent danger of being caught up by importunate lovers or fortune-hunters. Michael had been careful to preserve her from such risk during

her visit to his house. He had, as has been seen, previously to her arrival, given a word of warning to Stephen Palmer, who was, he thought, but too likely to become captivated with Clara Newton, in her twofold character of beauty and heiress.

There had been no cause, however, to suspect him of more than testifying that admiration which was perfectly natural when so pretty a girl was in the case, and staying in the same house.

Michael now felt his duty was done for the time being, and prepared to say farewell to his departing guests. He was not much given to soliloquizing or match-making; still, it must be confessed, his thoughts ran somewhat in the following direction :—

“Clara’s a nice little, natural thing ; we shall all miss her pretty face and nice ways. Stephen has been a good boy, on the whole. I stopped that *ecarté* after the first evening. She shall have fair play here ; no one shall say Michael Hammond kept his ward’s fortune in his own family, or took advantage of his trust to repair his nephew’s ruined fortunes. Poor boy ! it is hard upon him, but he must work his own way for the present ; he has energy enough for anything. Clara might do worse than take him ; he would take good care of her money—better, perhaps, than many a richer man. Well, there is plenty of time for her to choose and him to wait ; but it shall be all her own doing, and I hope she will choose no one till she comes of age ; till then,

I will do my duty to her. And poor Newton, the aunt, is a selfish old woman—but Clara is pretty safe with her.”

In the meantime, Mrs. Morris, with the assistance of her friend, was making every arrangement for her own comfort and convenience during the course of her journey home.

“Now,” said Mrs. Palmer, bustling into the room where Mrs. Morris sat waiting her final summons to the carriage then packing at the door—“Now, my dear Mrs. Morris, I have packed your luncheon-basket myself, and written on all the papers what is within. The sherry is in this bottle and water in that. Fanny can mix it for you, and I trust you will find everything comfortable, and not be

overtired by your journey; and you must mind and write, or let Fanny or Clara, and tell us how you get home. How sadly we shall miss you all!"

"Well, I am sure we have had a very pleasant visit, and been quite gay, and I have enjoyed myself in seeing so many old friends about me. It has been a fine time, too, for Fanny. I tell her she can't expect to meet such friends wherever I take her. She and Clara have done nothing but go about and amuse themselves ever since they came."

"I am glad they have been pleased with Holycross," said Mrs. Palmer, modestly. "I am sure, from all I hear, that every one is pleased with them; as for Clara, you can't think how much she is liked and admired. Mr. Forster told

me yesterday she was considered quite the belle of the ball-room."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Morris, in a purring, satisfied, soft voice, "every one told me she was me over again in that room—just like what I was; but I don't think myself that she has quite the height and figure I had."

"No, and never will have," said Mrs. Palmer, with quiet decision; "but Clara is enough like you to be a very pretty girl, now, you must tell me, when you write, about all the conquests she makes this winter, and fine offers she has."

"Dear! I don't expect she'll have so many. I never go out much in the winter when it is very cold; and if I do, I always come home early, so she won't have time for much flirting."


“Ah, depend upon it, you will have to go out a little more now, and stay longer; Clara will expect it.”

“I daresay she will,” returned Mrs. Morris placidly; “girls are so selfish, as I always say—they think about nothing but themselves; but I shan’t neglect my own health and comfort, for all that. But where are all the young people gone to? I must see Gabriel and your son, to wish them good-bye. Perhaps they will be coming up to London, and will give us a look in Wimpole Street when they do.”

“Ah, Mrs. Morris, don’t ask Stephen. For I could not bear to see him made unhappy; he has had sorrow and misfortune enough already, poor fellow, without any fault of his own.”

“Well, I daresay his uncle will make it up to him some day, if Gabriel does not marry, as you say he won’t; and then he can take his chance, with the best of them; and I am sure his looks are all in his favour, and I see no reason——”

“The carriage is ready, ma’am,” said the servant, opening the door and interrupting the rest of Mrs. Morris’s speech, to Mrs. Palmer’s infinite disgust; and as Mr. Hammond followed close upon him, there was nothing left for her to do but rise up and accompany her friend to the hall door. Clara and Fanny, accompanied by Gabriel and Stephen, had meanwhile been walking round the garden and grounds, and taking their leave of them. Stephen and Clara led the way, the two others followed; Gabriel was silent and



preoccupied, but Fanny, with happy tact, had so much to say about Lady Linwood and all her kindness, with an occasional tribute to Lillian's perfections, that he found his companion very agreeable, and thought the farewell walk extremely pleasant. Clara was not quite so lively and talkative as usual; she said the truth, however, that she had been very happy at the old House, and grieved to leave it, and those who had been so kind to her. Stephen began to think she had more heart than he had given her credit for, and half suspected his own was more vulnerable than he liked to own; so for the most part they performed the tour of the gardens in silence. As they neared the house on their return, Clara exclaimed,

"It is a charming old house, after all. Are not you very fond of it, Mr. Palmer!"

"I should be attached to it, I dare say, if it was mine," answered he; "but in the meantime, and in the uncertainty respecting its destination, I regard it with very modified feelings."

"What *uncertainty* do you mean?" asked Clara, her eyes resting on Gabriel, who now was in front of her and her companion.

"As to whom my uncle Michael will leave it to, of course. The speculation is a very distant one, I trust, but it involves much to me; you are aware he has everything in his own power."

"I hate thinking of such things, and who is to succeed people one likes," exclaimed Clara.

“Nevertheless, it must be done daily,” said Stephen calmly, “and does not bring the event a step nearer; it is weakness to shrink from such considerations—especially when the question involves all that is dearest to one in the world!”

“What! inheriting Holycross House?” asked Clara, half smiling.

“Yes,” replied Stephen firmly; “placing me in such a position (however distant the prospect of succession) that I might, without presumption, aspire to win the favour of the loveliest and most fascinating person I am acquainted with. Yes, Miss Newton, to gain the power of entertaining such a hope, do you wonder I wish for houses and lands?”

“You must think every one very mercenary,” replied Clara, hesitating and blush-

ing, "if it is necessary to possess such a qualification."

"You know, however, what my own feelings are on the subject," said Stephen, significantly; "but it is one I have no wish to press upon your consideration under present circumstances."

And with this ambiguous speech, which Clara long revolved in her mind, he hastened forward to open the door of the house which they had been discussing. In the hall they found Mrs. Morris in a state of gentle worry lest they should be too late, and wondering why they had kept her waiting there full three minutes by the clock.

"You will come again and see us next year, I hope," said Michael, in hospitable tones, as he placed Mrs. Morris in the

carriage, and handed his other guests in.

“Good-bye, my dear, don’t forget us,” continued he, addressing Clara. She, however, answered not, for she was speaking to Gabriel at the opposite window, in reply to his parting words, and hers were—

“Please don’t forget to tell Lillian to write.”

The carriage started at that moment.

Michael gazed after it for a few seconds, then walked slowly across the Market Place, and entered the bank.

The day following the departure of her guests, Mrs. Palmer sat by herself in the morning room. Her hands were employed in manufacturing some species of net-work, and her thoughts were not less industriously occupied in weaving a web of their own construction.

The door suddenly opened, and, looking up, she saw her son enter. He closed it cautiously after him, then opened it again, and looked round the lobby in which her room was situated.

“What is the matter?” said his mother, struck by these precautions, and the peculiar expression on her son’s countenance. “There is no one about now—you need not fear being overheard, if you have anything to tell me—what is it?”

“I want to talk to you about Gabriel,” replied Stephen. “Can you tell me what he is about, or whether he is mad, or anything the matter with him?”

“What do you mean? I have observed nothing particularly out of the common with him, except he seems to be making a greater fool of himself than ever with Lady Linwood

and that Miss Grant, but I don't believe he means anything by it."

"You have no idea, I suppose, of any particular calls he can have upon him for large sums of money just now?"

"Goodness! no. What do you mean? what has he been doing?"


"I know, for a certainty, that within the last two or three days he has drawn no less than a thousand pounds from his private account at the bank; what can he propose doing with it?"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Palmer, quite aghast. "What awful extravagance! living here as he is doing. I never thought Gabriel overburdened with sense, but this beats all I ever heard of his folly. Surely he can't have any great debts?"

“No, it is not that,” said Stephen; “I feel quite sure it is something new which has risen up lately, and I want you to assist me in finding it out. I can’t help suspecting that the Lodge people have something to do with it, or know all about it. I rather believe, though I am not quite sure, that he went there after he had drawn out the money. He will soon be ruined if he goes on in this way!”

“He must have considerable savings by this time?” suggested Mrs. Palmer.

“Not so much as you think; he is one of those people who manage to fritter away an immensity of money on trifles, besides being constantly befooled out of it for what he would call charitable purposes. Then you know he always




travels about in the month's holiday Uncle Michael allows us in the summer. And his partnership, although not almost nominal, like mine, does not produce any such immense profits. My uncle takes his living here and all that into consideration; and it is all accounted for in the interest he allows him on his ten thousand pounds."

"I know," returned his mother, "Michael is very exact in all his dealings with his friends as well as strangers. But I cannot think that Lady Linwood would want money from Gabriel; and as for a girl like Miss Grant, the thing is out of the question; unless they are going to make a runaway match, and he is preparing handsomely for a start. *That*, at all events, must be prevented. I can go

and see Lady Linwood, and discover something from her. I fancy she would like Lillian to marry her stepson, and that might account for such a proceeding; not that the girl herself can care for Gabriel, but, as Mrs. Morris says, 'Girls are so perverse!' We may, however, put a stop to it all yet."

Mrs. Palmer rose from her chair as she said this, with a look of determination and energy that seemed bent on carrying all before it; adding, as she did so,

"Depend upon it, if there is anything of the kind in the wind, and Gabriel finds himself frustrated and discovered, he will be so annoyed and ashamed of himself, that he will never venture to think of matrimony again; and so, my dear



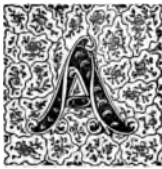
boy, you will be safe with both your uncles."

"Stop, mother," said Stephen, quietly; "sit down and listen to me. Indeed, you quite mistake me—I have no wish to prevent poor Gabriel's marrying. I have suspected, for some time, his thoughts ran in that direction; and if they do, there is no use in plotting against it. What will be, will be. And, as far as my ultimate interests are concerned, I do not think they can be better served than by Gabriel marrying Lillian Grant. You look surprised—it is a new view of the subject to you, but not to me. You know, however, the old family prejudice here for marrying in our own set and calling. My uncle Michael feels strongly on that point, and Miss Grant's connections would be ob-

jectionable to him. He knows that they (Lady Linwood excepted, perhaps) would only sanction and excuse Lillian's marriage with Gabriel (who is not rich himself), under the idea of his heirship to the wealthy banker; and you know he would delight in disappointing their expectations and speculations. He has the power of choosing his heir in the family, and can leave everything to his nephew as easily as he can to his brother. I wish no harm to Gabriel, but you know his hatred to business, and all his fancies and fooleries, which provoke Uncle Michael, though he says little or nothing about them. Now, if he added this marriage to crown all, I am persuaded it would be a great step in my favour, as it might provoke my uncle to make a fresh will and alter

the order of succession. It would be no injury to Gabriel, as he is really unfit for the heavy responsibilities of such a concern as is at issue. He would be quite content and far happier in dawdling and dreaming away his life with Lillian Grant on a moderate competency ; whilst Michael must be aware that I should not be likely to squander what he has scraped together. Meanwhile, I must find out for whom, and for what purpose, Gabriel drew that thousand pounds."

CHAPTER XII.



ANOTHER member of the family at Holycross House was also very desirous to know why and wherefore Gabriel had drawn so largely on his resources at the bank. This was Michael, who, on becoming aware of the fact, without ceremony proceeded to Gabriel's sitting-room at the top of the house, where so much of his spare time was passed. He found him there, as he expected; he was busy bending over a drawing, which he hastily concealed as his brother entered.

“Don’t let me interrupt your interesting pursuits,” said Michael, rather drily, “and forgive my intrusion.”

“My dear brother,” exclaimed poor Gabriel, starting up from his seat, and placing a chair for his brother, “how can you talk of intrusion? I am so glad to see you in my sanctum; you never come near it now, but you are not the less welcome when you do. I should like to show you my hortus siccus, now you are here; I have lately added some very rare new specimens to it.”

“I am afraid I have no genius or appreciation for such elegant trifling. I am too confirmed in my old plodding pursuits, and it is on a matter of business I am here now.”

“Anything for me to do at the bank

this afternoon?" asked Gabriel, in a tone of despondency.

"Do not be alarmed. Not that; and do not think me very meddling and impertinent, and tell me to mind my own business, if I ask for what purpose you drew a thousand pounds from the bank three days ago?"

Gabriel's pale face flushed over cheek and brow, to the very roots of his fair hair; but his brother was a privileged person with him, and to whatever he might choose to say he listened with deference, but he replied firmly,

"Brother, I cannot tell you; do not ask me."

"I have, I know, no right to ask," replied Michael, "and I think you will believe I do it in no spirit of curiosity, or

with an inquisitive desire to pry into those affairs you choose to keep private from me. But I cannot resist giving you a word of warning, even now, when I think there is occasion."

"And I thank you with all my heart for the kind intention, brother. I have no wish to keep any of my own affairs secret from you. You have always been my best friend, and I would hide nothing from you in which I alone am concerned."

"Ah! there it is," said Michael impatiently; "people have very few transactions in this world in which they alone, their individual selves, are concerned. There must generally be two or more parties to every proceeding!"

"What can I tell you, brother, except that I required the money I drew out for

a particular purpose?—which I think has been satisfactorily answered.”

“Tut! tut!—that is as little satisfactory an answer as can be. You are not rich enough, and probably never will be, to throw away a thousand pounds in that right royal manner; and all you can say is, you *hope* and you *trust* it has been properly expended! Now, I have great reason to doubt that it has been so—and if, as I believe, a certain Mr. Grant has had the benefit of your generosity, my persuasion is, your money might as well have been thrown into the depths of the sea.”

Gabriel started.

“Who mentioned Mr. Grant? Who has dared pry into my affairs?”

“Not I, Gabriel; and no one that I

am acquainted with. The case as it stands is very simple, and requires but little explanation. The wife of the man who keeps the 'Angel Inn' took a fifty-pound note in her husband's absence; it was given to pay a small account, of about as many shillings, due to them from this Mr. Grant, and paid on his departure, a day or two ago. This man brought the note to the bank, thinking it was a large one to change for so small a sum. I was there at the time, and one of our clerks said, in my hearing, it was one of twenty other fifties drawn by you a few days ago. Are you satisfied?"

Gabriel walked up and down the room, Michael's little keen grey eyes following his movements. He then said :

"You are not even acquainted with this

young man, who does not bear the best of characters ; at least, you never saw him before the night at the ball ? Eh ?”

“Never—but—but—he is Lady Linwood’s nephew——”

“I understand ; I only wonder at her countenancing such a proceeding.”

“She knew nothing of it,” said Gabriel, in a faltering tone ; “in fact, as you know so much, brother, I may as well show you a note I received from her when she became acquainted with the circumstances of my loan ; it will, at all events, exonerate her, and show you I am to be no loser by the affair.”

“I shall be very glad if you can prove that,” said Michael, in an incredulous tone, as he took the note Gabriel tendered, and read :

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have only just been made acquainted with the transaction that took place between my nephew and yourself during my absence, when you called at the Lodge the other day. With full appreciation of the generosity of your actions and intentions on the present occasion, I must tell you how deeply I regret the whole proceeding. Why did you not wait for my return, and give me the opportunity of expressing my opinion to yourself, and advising my nephew? Had the large sum you so lavishly placed at his disposal, for the avowed purpose of paying his debts, been offered in a more formal and business-like manner, and by one better entitled to act in the matter, I should have urged the necessity of making some proper arrangement for its appropriation to the

desired purpose. My nephew is, alas! so reckless and imprudent, that I hardly dare hope your intentions will be carried into effect. As it is, you shall be no loser from your generous conduct towards him, as I pledge myself to the payment of the interest of the £1000 borrowed by him, till some arrangement can be made about refunding the principal.

“Always your sincere friend,

“M. LINWOOD.”

“Yes, all right there. She is a sensible good woman, but it comes hard upon her to have to pay for that unprincipled spendthrift; and I have no patience with him. I would not have given him a sixpence; it is all cheating and swindling on his part, and his poor aunt suffers for it;

and I must say, Gabriel, you are greatly to blame, aiding and abetting and helping this young scamp. Such people as he are the pests of society; and they are to be encouraged and escape, whilst their best friends are to suffer."

"I cannot bear that Lady Linwood should think of repaying me; it is an affair between me and her nephew."

"Is it?" asked Michael, sharply; "had no one else anything to do with it?"

Gabriel was silent, but his cheek flushed again.

"Yes, you know who well enough, though her aunt would not implicate her; but *she* must not rest under an obligation to you."

"I do not see," replied Gabriel, after a moment's pause, "why I should, of

necessity, be debarred the privilege of exercising the claims of a friendship as sincere as it is unpresuming, even though it may be manifested in this (to you) objectionable form; and, on the other hand, surely a pure, trusting heart will frankly accept the aid it offers, knowing that, in so doing, the obligation is conferred, not received."

"Very fine talking," said Michael impatiently, "but not much to the purpose in the present case. Young ladies cannot borrow indiscriminately—well then"—in answer to a gesture of annoyance from Gabriel—"or do so on their brother's account, without incurring some remark. Nor are you, as concerns that brother, intimate or wealthy enough to hold out an open purse for him to dip his needy fingers

into?—unless, indeed, you stood on such terms with the family as to authorize your interference in its affairs. Pray, may I ask—not that I believe or think it myself, but something suggested by Mrs. Palmer induces me to put the question—are you engaged to Miss Grant, or does any understanding of that nature exist between you?”

“I am not—there is nothing of the kind,” answered Gabriel steadily; though, at the same time, a sensation of wild happiness thrilled through every nerve at the supposition.


“I am glad to hear it,” said Michael calmly. “Such a marriage would be agreeable neither to her family nor yours; at least, if I may be allowed to express an opinion on the subject. As regards my-

self, I have no objection, personally, to the young lady, but she comes of a poor and proud race; you know how you would be received by Lady Stapleton and her clique. Lady Linwood too, I presume, entertains other views for her niece."

"Enough! enough!" cried poor Gabriel, deprecating further remarks from his pitiless brother. "I have never aspired in the manner you suggest, therefore spare me further discussion of the subject. I am but too conscious of my own defects and deficiencies ever to have entertained so wild a hope. I am also well aware of what your sentiments are respecting my chances of success in seeking a wife."

"Pooh! pooh!" exclaimed Michael; "what crotchet have you taken into your head now? I did not believe them when

Stephen and his mother said you were offended at my laughing about going to your wedding. If I considered the event unlikely, it was only because you have always made a point, heretofore, of running away from the young ladies. You would have as good a chance as another, no doubt, if you chose to try your luck. I can, of course, have no objection to your doing so, if you think you will be happier married than single; all I say and advise is, that you will be careful in the choice of a wife—it is not every one that would suit you. You should find some one with a little money, too. You are not rich at present yourself, and you are not a man to save? You are naturally indolent, and have expensive whims and fancies; so you should look for a wife who will



take care of what you have got, and not help you to squander. Such a girl, now, as Harriet Forster—a clever, sensible, straightforward woman, who has managed her father's house, and taken care of all those boys of his, for the last ten years; just your own age, too. What do you think of her?"

Gabriel smiled sadly at the mention of Michael's choice for him; though he would have shuddered had he been obliged to act upon the suggestion, as he thought of the plain, unattractive woman selected for him by his brother, good and praiseworthy as he acknowledged her to be. But his ideas of female loveliness and perfection had ever been fastidious, and almost poetical; nor had they been in the most distant way realized,

until his acquaintance with Lillian Grant.

“Thank you, brother, I have no wish for a wife at present.”

“Well, perhaps you don’t consider Miss Forster handsome enough; but you might like her if you tried—not but that I think you are best as you are.”

“Yes—I know—no doubt you do; for you have never cared for any woman yourself.”

“Haven’t I, though?” said Michael, turning quickly upon him.

“Have you ever, indeed, brother?” asked Gabriel, with a sudden feeling of interest and some surprise, as he surveyed the cold, hard face, which however he loved so well.

“Well, yes; if it is any comfort to you, or example, if you need it, I can tell

you I loved the mother of Clara Newton many, many years ago! We were both very young in those days, and she was the eldest of a large, struggling family. I should have had them all upon my hands if we had married. Then my father died, and I had plenty to think of and act for, and no leisure for love, or any time for self-pleasing, so I never asked her to become my wife; and when time went on, and I might in prudence have done so, she was lost to me, and had married John Newton. Well, poor soul! she died in the course of a few years; but I devoted myself still more to business, and never stopped to grieve for what I could not help; and no one ever knew or suspected. So I advise you, Gabriel, if you ever had any foolish fan-

cies that had better not be encouraged, to set to work in earnest and get rich ; and if you choose to marry, look out for a profitable wife, and not such a one as Miss Grant would make you."

"Say no more about her, my dear brother," said Gabriel, who recoiled from the mention of the "one loved name," and yet felt touched by his reserved brother's confidence, considering, with almost remorseful consciousness, that the charge of himself and others had contributed to make him what he was—so early in Michael's life imposing a stern task upon him, to which his own youthful prospects had been sacrificed. Gabriel, however, estimated his brother's former feelings by his own present ones ; and they could really bear no comparison, either in depth or intensity.

He continued, however, to force himself to speak with candour, and to return confidence with confidence, saying—

“Do not let this subject be mentioned again. Perhaps you rightly suspect that, though I have never dared to form a hope of winning Lillian Grant’s affections, my own are devoted to her, and ever will be. I know I am no suitable match for one who deserves the best this world can give, and who is sure to have the power of marrying as she chooses. She would never dream of regarding me otherwise than a friend, such as I have been to her aunt; and I have lately enjoyed a fleeting happiness in being admitted on those terms to her society also. I would gladly have continued to be so considered, without a thought or a hope beyond. But I have

been censured, both by Lady Linwood and by you, for this last unfortunate demonstration of my regard and friendship."

"Have you seen her since then?" asked Michael.

"Yes; I went to see her after the receipt of her letter. She was kind as ever to me, but spoke strongly on the subject—blaming me for taking advantage, she said, of Lillian's ignorance of business, and her brother's selfish recklessness, to lay both under so heavy an obligation to myself. I had never looked at it in that light; but I saw it then. In my anxiety to do something for her, I had acted with indiscretion and foolish haste. Lady Linwood forgave me, but takes the whole burden on herself. I never saw her so much worried and annoyed before."

“No wonder!—all that wicked spend-thrift’s doings; and that poor girl encourages him; and whoever marries her, will find him thrown into the bargain, and tied like a millstone round his neck—happy if they don’t all sink together! He would soon make an end of you, with your easiness of temper, and dislike to give pain or disoblige. I would not see such a marriage as that for you, on any account; and am glad, indeed, there seems no chance of it. Now,” concluded Michael, rising from his chair, “I have said my say, and there’s an end of this subject for ever, I hope. What have you got in all those cages I see in that corner?” asked he, with a view of changing the current of his brother’s thoughts, as he approached the door.

“One is a cage of canaries ; the other,” Gabriel hesitated, “is a bullfinch, I was training and teaching for Lil—Miss Grant ; but I suppose I had better not send it ?”

“Yes, yes—send it, if you have promised. Don’t change from hot to cold all in a moment.”

CHAPTER XIII.



T was all over then, Gabriel felt, without having made an effort, or attempted to make the least movement in his own behalf. Michael had rudely brushed away every stepping-stone that might have helped to bear him across the deep waters that separated him from the object of his affections.

There was to be no more happy trifling; henceforth he knew his danger, and he was aware that if he continued to seek

Lillian's presence as before, it must be at the sacrifice of his peace of mind and happiness for ever, if indeed they were not already gone. He thought, too, that his old friend, Lady Linwood, was changed in feeling towards him; that his last rash act had opened her eyes as to his sentiments towards her niece, and by the blame she cast upon the proceeding she evinced her disapprobation of the feeling from which it originated.

A week passed after the date of Michael's visit to Gabriel's room. The worry and annoyance of feeling that had succeeded produced the usual result which with him was ever sure to be the consequence of much nervous excitement. Distressing headaches and sleepless nights for several days followed; and when he absented himself from the family

meals, it was no feigned excuse when he declared himself unable to attend them.

Mrs. Palmer on such occasions shook her head mysteriously ; Michael received the messages with a dissatisfied species of grunt ; while Stephen ate his dinner with apparent stoical indifference. At the end of a week, however, Gabriel emerged from his retirement, looking paler and more fragile than ever, but composed in manner, and even cheerful in his attempts at conversation. He was not selfishly bent on making everyone suffer because the happiness his heart, so ardently desired, was, he felt persuaded, not to be attained by him. He must endeavour to bear that, as he had already borne many privations and mortifications known to himself alone.

Michael was vexed, both for Gabriel, and

also with him, for the suffering he was aware that Gabriel must experience in relinquishing without hope the first and only dream of love he had ever indulged in.

Mrs. Palmer assumed a sort of significant manner on the occasion, and appeared purposely to avoid all mention of their neighbours at the Lodge, as if it were forbidden ground.

During that weary dinner Gabriel's thoughts were often absent, for he had taken Michael's advice, or rather availed himself, as it were, of his permission, and sent the bullfinch over to the Lodge, wisely judging that, as it had been long talked of, and promised, the withholding it might rouse suspicions as to his motives and feelings. After some demur with himself, Gabriel thought it best to send the bird to Lady

Linwood, with a note of apology for not having called before. The note was very short, and merely stated that one of his old attacks of indisposition had prevented his calling with his little *protégée*, which he now sent, and begged to offer for her kind acceptance, hoping it would do credit to his instructions, concluding with kind remembrances to Miss Grant.

This note, with the cage, had been despatched previously to his leaving his own room that day, and he nervously tormented himself with anticipating the answer Lady Linwood might send, and in speculating as to whether she would write at all. And then he experienced a kind of pleasurable emotion in thinking *where* his little favourite was now located, and that something so lately in his own presence

and possession was now in Lillian's. Thus musing, as soon as the meal was over, Gabriel hastily sought his own room, where he had directed the servant to leave any note, or deliver any message, he might bring back from the Lodge. To his almost horror and consternation, the first object that met his inquiring eyes, on entering, was the cage and bird returned to their former place; and a small white object lay on the table—it was a note—a note from Lady Linwood! Poor nervous sensitive Gabriel took it in his trembling fingers, whilst his heart beat almost audibly, and the thoughts kept revolving in his brain—"Refused my poor bird!—what have I done? Alas! alas!—my over-officiousness with that hateful money, shall I never be forgiven?"

He sat down to calm his perturbation, and at last opened the note. It was dated the preceding day:

“DEAR GABRIEL,

“I cannot leave home without giving you a line to tell you of my whereabouts. I had hoped to have seen you at the Lodge ere this, but you are possibly busy just now, and I have been kept in the house by a cold. We are going from home for a few weeks, on a visit to my aunt, Mrs. Murray, at St. Leonard's. She is an invalid, and advanced in years, so I do not like to refuse her request that I should go and see her this winter. We are on the point of starting, but I hope we shall return with the spring. Till then, adieu. Ever yours,

“M. LINWOOD.”

This was a relief. The bird was not refused, and, all things considered, he was not sorry that his friends should make a temporary absence. No doubt, when they returned, he could meet Lillian with that composed and subdued feeling he should henceforth strive to entertain for her. Lady Linwood was evidently still friendly as ever towards him, and Gabriel's heart felt lighter than it had done for weeks past.

The departure of the Lodge party for the winter was, of course, soon known and discussed in the Holycross coteries; and Gabriel felt annoyed when he observed how cautiously Mrs. Palmer avoided the subject when he happened to be near, and seemed determined to consider his relations with Lady Linwood and all belonging to her a forbidden topic.

In the meantime, the hospitalities of the season went their round ; dinners and evening parties were numerous in and about the town, whilst the old House of Holycross welcomed its wonted guests as usual.

These were formal gatherings, which Michael tolerated, and even from old custom rather liked. Mrs. Palmer was in her element, for she greatly enjoyed cold, stiff, full-dressed, ceremonious meetings. Stephen Palmer was in constant request, and, though never very genial, was nevertheless a most popular member of the Holycross *beau monde*. Gabriel was certainly less regarded and less thought of than any other member of the banker's family party.

Of late years, or rather months, per-

haps, there had been a growing feeling—how originating no one knew—that Gabriel was likely to be superseded in the succession to the inheritance of Holy-cross House by the worthier and more energetic nephew, whom Mr. Hammond evidently favoured, and who took by far the most active part in all matters of business.

Rumours there were, also, touching Gabriel's incapacity for the management even of his own affairs, which necessarily created a doubt in the public mind of his fitness to be intrusted—should he survive his brother—with the higher responsibilities of the banking and commercial firm of Hammond & Co.

Mrs. Palmer, in the privacy of her gossiping coterie, was wont to express

her regret at the circulation of such reports, and to those of her friends, also, who had never previously heard of their existence. By such means they gained universal credit, as Mrs. Palmer did not contradict there being ground for them. She continued, also, to shake her head mysteriously when further questioned concerning her younger brother, and only expressed her wish that people would mind their own affairs, and not seek to draw to light such family histories as were better left undisturbed.

Mrs. Palmer, too, with cunning tact, diverted Michael's inquiries, which might have grown into anxiety respecting his brother, as he avoided society more than ever. She spoke of him with feigned affection, and regretted that he should care

so little for his own family and friends ; observing that, since the Lodge party had left the neighbourhood, he found no one good enough to associate with ; that it was a pity he gave way to his indolent and exclusive ways and habits, and treated old friends with such contemptuous coldness.

But all this was more insinuated than openly said. She spoke no words that could be brought against her, or the meaning inquired into. She silently watched the effects on her elder brother, and began covertly to rejoice as Michael became insensibly estranged, by her representations, from Gabriel, who was to him as devoted as ever.

She also had her reward in another and even more gratifying way, for she her-

self began to rise higher than ever in public estimation. She was looked upon as the mother of the fortunate young man who would eventually be the heir to so large a property and ancient, though commercial, inheritance. Even Lady Stapleton began to find she was in the minority in continuing to ignore the existence of Mrs. Palmer, and to cut her son whenever they chanced to meet. Such rencontres were then of very frequent occurrence; for Stephen, handsome and gentlemanlike, became in request with the dancing part of the community, and at all the balls, public and private, Lady Stapleton was sure to see him, whilst Mrs. Palmer frequently sat in state amongst the dowagers of high degree.

Gabriel's thoughts, meanwhile, followed

his absent friends ; and although he fancied he had entirely relinquished all hope of nearer and dearer associations, he could not resolve upon losing sight of them altogether. After a certain time, therefore, he ventured to write to Lady Linwood ; and as she replied kindly to his letter, and testified all her former interest in himself and his pursuits, he gladly took advantage of this opportunity of renewed intercourse. It happily saved him from sinking into a state of utter and hopeless despair ; for Gabriel felt that whilst there was a possibility of hearing from and writing to Lady Linwood, there was still some enjoyment in life—existence was not the entirely barren waste he had lately supposed it to be.

Lady Linwood and her niece were at this time spending a quiet winter as the guests

of a confirmed invalid aunt, a Mrs. Murray, at Hastings. Lillian had, however, frequent opportunities of joining in the gaieties of the place, and she did so occasionally, but Lady Linwood observed how little real interest she appeared to take in what was going on, and how indifferent she was to those things generally so attractive to girls of her age, especially to one so much admired as Lillian appeared at that time to be. A very convincing proof of her success in the society there, was given in the attention she received on her first appearance from a certain fastidious Mr. Trevor, whose admiration immediately stamped her claims to be considered the beauty *par excellence* of the place; and Lillian soon after had the further distinction of receiving an offer of

marriage from this gentleman. As this proposed connexion would have been in every way a very advantageous one for her, Lady Linwood begged Lillian to take it into consideration, and to pause a moment before she declined it as decidedly as she appeared resolved to do; telling her that, if she could regard Mr. Trevor in the light he wished her to do, it would give her the greatest satisfaction to see her so happily settled in life.

“All in good time, dearest aunt; I know you are in no hurry to send me away from you. Next time,” said Lillian, laughing, “you shall have the casting vote; but you must, please, let me say ‘no’ this once.”

And so Lady Linwood assented.

They were soon after enlivened by a

visit from Captain Linwood, who came over from Canterbury, where he was quartered, to see his stepmother, and venture on another sight of her pretty and fascinating niece. Whether it was that seeing the admiration Lillian met with at Hastings, or whether she appeared really more irresistible than she had done six months previously, it is impossible to decide; but it is certain he lingered on, and, like a silly moth, singed his wings whilst he fluttered around the flame. Captain Linwood, having a large acquaintance, found a great many people he knew at Hastings, and many of these were introduced to his stepmother and Lillian; and the latter became besieged with constant invitations to join in various pleasant parties in the morning, and allowed

herself to be chaperoned to balls and other gay places in the evening. Lillian had, however, a decided objection to leaving her aunt to spend long solitary days with her invalid relative, particularly as she was aware the latter enjoyed both her music and her reading, as well as the little variety of her society.

How different from her sister Agnes, who had always made a point of escaping from the dulness of a family party, and left her aunt, to whom she was indebted for a home, without apology or remark, whenever the opportunity for doing so advantageously presented itself.

It happened after a time that Captain Linwood became so domestic in his habits as to excite the wonder and admiration of old Mrs. Murray, who, from her sofa in


the evening, was an amused and cheerful spectator of all that was going on around her, and thankful to her younger guests for the pleasant variety their companionship afforded in her life of monotony and seclusion.

She soon saw the attraction that brought Captain Linwood so constantly to visit his stepmother, and to put up with her old aunt's home and society. Mrs. Murray had become very fond of her great-niece Lillian, though the rest of her family were not favourites. Her nephew, Captain Grant, had forfeited her regard by his neglect in bygone days, when they had been more thrown together; and afterwards, when he had applied to her for assistance in his difficulties, it had been unceremoniously refused. Mrs. Mur-

ray was rich, but she had little or nothing to leave—her large jointure merging in the family property at her decease. She had no family herself, and few ties or relations on her husband's side or her own. And as she lived up to her income (or rather had done so till she became too much of an invalid to enjoy society), there was little room for speculation as to the distribution of any property she might leave behind her.

Lady Linwood was very anxious to engage her interest in behalf of her reckless nephew, Alexander; hoping by her aid he might be extricated from his present difficulties and embarrassments, and inclined to mend his ways before it was too late; and she trusted that some arrangement might be effected for the

repayment of the debt to Gabriel Hammond, the interest of which was an inconvenient tax upon her limited income, whilst the liquidation of the principal was as totally out of her reach as of that of the reckless borrower. Whilst she was thus revolving plans for benefiting her nephew, Lady Linwood observed, with delighted surprise, Captain Linwood actually begin to court the danger he had formerly feared, and ostensibly fled from when last with her. She did not sufficiently realise his character, and the selfish impulses that so frequently actuated his conduct, as well as the caprice which made his inconsistencies often so unintelligible in her eyes. She feared, however, to notice to him the change she detected in his behaviour to Lillian, whom



he now openly sought, and attached himself to, on all occasions. She little suspected that the rumour of her rejection of Mr. Trevor, and the attention so generally paid to her, gave Lillian a charm in his estimation that was worth the risk, even at a heart-ache, if he saw fit to carry his present flirtation no further. What Lillian thought no one knew, nor did Lady Linwood seek to inquire; for she fondly hoped she could discern the dawn of a happy and united future for the two beings so dear to her.

CHAPTER XIV.



THE name of Forster appeared second to that of Hammond in the banking firm of which Michael was the head. Mr. Forster was not only the partner, but enjoyed the rare privilege of being the particular friend of Mr. Hammond. They were united by ties of long association as well as of mutual regard, and a considerable degree of intimacy had for many years existed between the two gentlemen and their respective families.

Mr. Forster possessed a pleasant house on the breezy common, about a mile from that part of the town where his friend lived, and where they met daily on their business avocations.

This inducement to exercise, in the walk to and from the bank, morning and evening, was one of the many advantages which Mr. Forster found in the situation of his comfortable residence. He was a plain, quiet man, with grave manners; but under this still surface lay much kindness of heart, with a sound and discriminating judgment. He had been a widower some years, and his daughter Harriet had, as the eldest of a large family, taken her lost mother's place, and supplied, as far as was possible, the great loss to her family and household.

The eldest son, William, was in the

church, married, and in possession of a living near Holycross; the second had lately entered the Army, and it chanced was in the same regiment as Alexander Grant. The three remaining children were still boys at the grammar-school in the town, where they went as day boarders.

It happened that Jack Forster was at home on leave, and one morning, soon after his return, found Harriet at an early hour in her own morning room; it was a very unpretending-looking apartment, something like the person who occupied it, with little of beauty or adornment to recommend it. Harriet Forster was in every particular a plain, good, sensible woman, and one who led a useful, practical life. On this day she was turning her attention, as was her custom at

the beginning of every week, to sundry small manuscript books in marble covers, bearing the names of the various trades-people who supplied the household, and was preparing to devote herself to their consideration, when her brother Jack made his first appearance.

“What! not gone to breakfast yet?”

“Finished an hour ago, and sent the boys to school,” replied Harriet, as laconically.

“You don’t say so! And the governor, where is he?—gone to the shop yet?”

“My father had not started for the bank when I left the breakfast-room—he was reading the paper—I daresay you will find him there still.”

“And everything stone-cold by this

time, I suppose! Commend me to the delights of a family-breakfast at eight o'clock!"

"Well, there is no occasion for you to over-exert yourself, and get up for it," said Harriet, who was really good-natured; "you have only to ring and have the things cleared away, and I will come and make some fresh tea for you."

"That's right; you must make much of me whilst I am here. I hoped yesterday morning was a specimen of improved hours, and an increase of civilization in the family!"

"You forget it was Sunday, and the boys had not to go to school."

"Ah! I forget, as you say!—yes, I find I *do* forget—it is one of the signs of age I feel and deplore. Do you re-

member how long it is since I left home ?
I declare I almost forget that !”

“Nearly a year, I think” said Harriet.
“Let us see—this is March—ah! yes, you went away last April—nearly a year, then, it must be; but come and have your breakfast now, these books can wait till I come back.”

“Oh! those dreadful books, they make me shudder to look at their covers!—what must their contents be!—how can you endure a weekly repetition of such horrors?”

“Somebody must look at them,” said Harriet, quietly, “and I don’t mind casting up accounts.”

“Don’t you, indeed? You are a good creature, Harriet! but I fear it might be said of you, as of some other notable house-

wife, that you would not be happy in heaven, as there are no account-books there!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Jack. Will you come now?"

"I am in no hurry—I shall wait till my father is gone, he hates the bustle I should make, and might request my company in future to breakfast with him at eight A.M."

"And no great hardship, I should think," said Harriet, taking up her work *en attendant*.

"Now, tell me all the news that I had not time to ask yesterday. You told me that pretty Miss Grant is still at St. Leonard's; do you write to her?—and what does she say? I should like to see one of her letters."

“I am sorry I have none to show you,” said his sister. “I have only heard once from Lady Linwood, and that was about the school, and some of her poor people.”

“Oh! never mind that, I don’t want to hear what she said; but I wish they would come back whilst I’m here. You saw Grant, I suppose, when he came down—you know he belongs to ours?”

“So I heard. Do you like him? I hope he is not a friend of yours—at least, if what is said about him is true.”

“Don’t be alarmed. No, Alexander Grant is no particular friend of mine; he is in an awfully fast set, quite beyond me and my means.”

"I am glad of it; but I understood he was poor—at least, that he and his sisters had nothing."

"No more they have, by rights; but he contrives to spend something, rather more than any man of his standing in the regiment, and yet they say he has nothing but a pittance from some uncle, not enough to find him in gloves and cigars. I suspect, though, he picked up something when he came down here—from the Stapletons, I suppose—as he paid some gambling debts on his return, the only ones he ever does pay."

"How can that be, without money?"

"Oh! he wins occasionally, I suppose, but they say it was quite a shave with him just then, but he seems to be all straight again now. Well! and what have you

done with the heiress? You had her here some time amongst you—I wish I had been here then. I might have had a chance. Is any one in these parts likely to win?”

“I am sure I can’t tell you,” said Harriet. “Some people said that Mr. Palmer, being so much with her, had the best chance; but I did not see anything that looked like it between them myself.”

“Ah! but you never do see those sort of things; at all events, then, she was not openly appropriated?”

“Not that I know of.”

“And Miss Grant—is she still fancy-free?”

“I am sure that is more than I can tell you. I heard, indeed, that Captain

Linwood had been paying her great attention at St. Leonards, and that she was very much admired there; so possibly she may not be so by this time. Oh! here is my father!"

As Mr. Forster, entered Jack slipped by him into the room he had just quitted, whilst he proceeded to put on his neck-handkerchief and greatcoat by the fire, where his daughter was then standing.

"Going to give that idle boy his breakfast, Harriet?"

"Yes, father, presently. Stay! let me help you on with your coat."

"You spoil all those boys, my dear. There! it is bitterly cold, give me that wrapper."

"Are you going now to the bank?"

asked Harriet, as she tied it round his neck.

“No. I told Hammond I should not be there till the afternoon. I want to ride over and see William this morning—any message to mamma and the babies?”

“Oh! yes—I have a parcel to send them!”

“Then give it me quickly, dear. But whom have we here? I can’t stay now; you must say not at home”—he retracted. —“no, don’t.”

The person, at first indistinctly seen, now passed close by the window, and the tall, stooping, but not ungraceful figure proclaimed it to be Gabriel Hammond.

“What brings him here at this hour?”

exclaimed Mr. Forster in surprise ; “so seldom, too, as he comes !”

“Yes,” said Harriet, with a slight flush ; “since William married and left home, I don’t think Gabriel Hammond has called twice in the year.”

“Well, we must let him in now ; perhaps he begins to think better of his old friends again,” said Mr. Forster, with a hasty look at his daughter.

They had been old playfellows once, and William Forster, a quiet, retiring boy, like Gabriel himself, had been one of his peculiar friends, until his marriage and consequent removal from Holycross withdrew him from the immediate neighbourhood.

On entering the room, Gabriel’s greetings were made in a hasty and pre-oc-

cupied manner, as if some other subject was uppermost in his mind; but he soon remarked—

“You are going out, Mr. Forster?”

“Yes, to William’s; will you come with me? You have not been to Fernley for an age.”

“I can’t now, thank you,” said Gabriel; “and if you are not particularly engaged to go there, perhaps you will return with me, for I came at my brother’s request to beg you to look in upon him this morning. He does not find himself well, and he is obliged to keep in the house, which must be my apology for coming at this early hour.”

“Michael Hammond ill! I am indeed grieved to hear it!” exclaimed Mr. Forster, in surprise, for he did not remember

such an event as his partner's indisposition ever occurring before. "I trust there is not much the matter with him?"

"I hope not, indeed," replied Gabriel, with a grave anxious face. "He has had a cold hanging about him for some time, and persisted in not regarding it. This weather has been intensely severe, but he has been up and about the same as usual, notwithstanding; and this morning, as soon as he got to the bank, he was seized with shivering fits, and felt so giddy and ill, that he was compelled to return home. I went there, and returned home with him, and fear he will be obliged, as soon as possible, to go to bed; but he begged I would fetch you first, as he said he must see you, at your earliest convenience; he wished to give

you some instructions in case he should be worse. So now if you can accompany me pray come at once, it would be doing him a great kindness, and set his mind at ease."

The idea of Michael Hammond being so ill as to be incapable of attending to their pressing concerns, was almost bewildering to Mr. Forster, who had always been in the habit of referring everything to him, as one able, both from bodily and mental strength, to digest any amount of business; and he had never looked forward to the possibility of the whole weight of management devolving upon himself as the superior.

He, however, quickly took up his hat and cane, and followed Gabriel, who, with a countenance full of anxious concern, was

hardly sensible of the presence of Harriet Forster, still less of the kind and friendly solicitude felt and expressed by her.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

